

## INTRODUCTION

# The New Landscape of Education Politics

Barbara Ferman

*Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.*

Martin Luther King Jr.

IN THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE of education politics, we are witnessing an exciting outpouring of grassroots activity from parents, teachers, students, and community residents seeking to preserve education as a collective good that is locally and democratically controlled, adequately funded, and responsive to the needs of all students and the communities in which they live. This activity is occurring in large and small cities, in suburban and rural areas, across racial and socioeconomic groups, and across partisan lines. While the specifics may vary by location and issue, these individuals and groups, some new entrants to the political fray, are challenging established political configurations as well as creating possibilities for new alliances. These activities are helping to change local and state policy, and, in some cases, momentum is bubbling up to the national level, which, in turn, is reinforcing local efforts.

In 2010, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), the progressive arm of the Chicago Teachers Union, elected Karen Lewis over the old-line leadership to head the union, a direct challenge to Mayor Rahm Emanuel's efforts to privatize schools and decrease union and teacher autonomy. Since Lewis's election, the union has worked closely with communities of color to heal old wounds and establish new coalitions. In New York City, parents, students, and other education activists played a key role in the 2013 election of Mayor Bill DeBlasio, a candidate critical of the education policies of his predecessor, Michael Bloomberg.<sup>1</sup> In Philadelphia, the teachers union and community and student groups put aside past differences to promote an alternative agenda for public education. On March 7, 2016, more than 3,500 students walked out of Boston Public Schools to protest Mayor Martin Walsh's proposed \$50 million budget cut to education, which would have resulted in school closings, teacher layoffs, the elimination of AP classes and extracurricular activities, and a decrease in services for special education students.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, more than 670,000 students opted out of standardized exams across the country, while many local school boards adopted resolutions stating their opposition to high-stakes testing and many states eliminated altogether or postponed standardized tests as conditions for high school graduation.<sup>3</sup> The growth and success of this "opt-out" movement was largely aided by new alliances between students, teachers, and parents as they collectively said "no" to the high-stakes testing regime.

These grassroots activities have also provided the ingredients for—and, in turn, have been aided by—some national efforts. Building on the momentum of local organizing efforts in Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, among other cities, the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) formed in 2013.<sup>4</sup> Comprised of ten national organizations, AROS has been helping to organize labor, community, parent, and student organizations around the goal of ensuring a "system of publicly funded, equitable, and democratically controlled public schools."<sup>5</sup> The Schott Foundation has been instrumental in funding organizing around public education; it was active in the education component of the 2013 New York City mayoral campaign and in prioritizing education issues in the 2014 gubernatorial election in Pennsylvania and the 2015 mayoral race in Philadelphia. In the latter two cases, as with the New York election, the foundation was interested in backing candidates that were "committed to addressing educational inequities."<sup>6</sup> Its funding also helped to

launch the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools. Culminating these numerous but dispersed events was the People's March for Public Education and Social Justice on July 8, 2016, in Washington, DC. Organized by a wide variety of groups, including Save Our Schools, Bad Ass Teachers, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and United Opt Out, the gathering sought to build a broad-based coalition by reaching out to social justice organizations such as the Black Lives Matter movement.

The possibilities and excitement unleashed by these sorts of activities, however, have been tempered by several factors. First, they are occurring in a context that is rapidly changing and fraught with confusion, that is highly fragmented and extremely conflictual, that has strong racial overtones, and that sometimes pits neighbor against neighbor. They are also occurring in the context of a high-stakes debate over who makes education policy, in whose interests, and for what purposes. This is the new politics of education, and it is perhaps the most important policy area in our democracy today.

## FROM QUIET CONSENSUS TO CONTESTED PLURALISM

The political landscape of US public education has shifted dramatically since the 1990s. While the education arena has always been marked by conflict, especially around the purpose of education, resources and their distribution, and racial integration, the disagreements existed within the framework of a larger consensus.<sup>7</sup> For most of the twentieth century, the politics of education rested on an underlying consensus of local control. Although there were many problems with local control, such as segregated and unequal schools, there nevertheless existed a larger consensus that education should be locally governed. With the 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the consensus framework was expanded to include equity considerations, with liberals seeking additional funding for disadvantaged students and conservatives seeking to preserve local control over education.<sup>8</sup>

Within this schema, according to Elizabeth DeBray-Pelot and Patrick McGuinn, existing interest groups on both the liberal and conservative sides did not play an active role in policy making. In fact, for vastly different reasons, their major contributions consisted of opposing policies perceived as increasing the federal government's role in education.

On the liberal side, the teacher unions were the most powerful interest groups, and they opposed any policies—such as merit pay, alternative licensing, and vouchers—they felt would threaten their control over collective bargaining. Interest groups on the conservative side, the most prominent being libertarian, states' rights, and Christian Right organizations, opposed federal policies because of their antigovernment philosophy (or, in the case of the Christian Right, fears of having to include topics such as sex education and evolution in the curriculum).<sup>9</sup> In short, as long as the funding kept coming and the strings were few and loosely attached, these groups were relatively content with the status quo.

That consensus began to fray with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and the alarm bells it rang. Conflating education concerns with a crisis in national security, the report contributed more to the political climate of school reform than any other single report.<sup>10</sup> In its depiction of a failing US education system, the report articulated the urgent need for education standards. Linking academic performance to economic development, its call for standards struck a chord among some southern governors who presided over faltering economies, as well as many in the business community. *A Nation at Risk* magnified a movement that began in the 1970s when governors like Lamar Alexander (R-TN, who served as secretary of education in 1991–93) and Bill Clinton (D-AR) focused on improving education in order to attract jobs to their states.<sup>11</sup> Magnification took the form of an organized push for standards as the actions of individual governors morphed into a collective effort embraced by the National Governors Association in the 1980s and 1990s.

These rumblings from below did not go unheeded at the national level. While Ronald Reagan, who was president when *A Nation at Risk* was published, and his successor, George H. W. Bush, opposed a larger role for the federal government in education on ideological grounds, they did feel compelled to symbolically acknowledge that there was a problem in education. Reagan's acknowledgment came largely in the form of attacking public education, while Bush convened an education summit that brought together all fifty governors and released his America 2000 Plan, which called for voluntary national standards.<sup>12</sup> Clinton's election in 1992 moved the national dial on education from symbolic to substantive but still left control of education to the states. His signature legislation, Goals 2000, signed into law in 1994, called for states to "develop standards, testing and accountability systems."<sup>13</sup>

Goals 2000 was poorly received by both parties—Republicans because of the perceived expansion of the federal government into education and Democrats because of the potential to negatively impact support for resources. As a result, the measure was watered down prior to passage, thus weakening the federal government’s ability to enforce any reforms. Symbolic acts and watered-down legislation notwithstanding, the many activities at the state and national levels since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* created the momentum for a sea change in education policy and politics.

Enter George W. Bush. Where Democratic president Clinton was partially hamstrung by Republican opposition, his Republican successor did not have the same constraints. And Bush also profited from the frustration over what appeared to be the many failed attempts to improve the quality of public education. Many in the business community, who traditionally supported state over federal roles in education, became disenchanted with the slow movement toward standards at the state level and began pressuring national officials to develop standards. They were joined in their frustration and efforts by some governors and civil rights groups, the latter viewing standards and accountability measures as ways to ensure that black and brown students were not being shortchanged by the education system. Also, some liberal Democrats and moderate Republicans, also discouraged by the lack of educational achievement in many public schools, jumped on the standards bandwagon.<sup>14</sup>

This convergence ushered in a new consensus in education politics, and accountability, standards, and testing became the new mantras. This consensus formed the basis of the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, dubbed No Child Left Behind (NCLB), passed in 2002 with strong bipartisan support in both houses (House 384–45, Senate, 91–8). Although the legislation left responsibility for developing standards to the individual states, it clearly extended the federal role in education with its provisions for annual testing and “Adequately Yearly Progress” measurements, its requirement that states guarantee that teachers are “highly qualified,” and the threat of financial consequences for failing to meet the state standards. Despite criticisms of NCLB from many corners, Bush’s successor, Barack Obama, extended the market-based logic and federal role that characterized NCLB through his Race to the Top (RTTT), a 2009 competitive grant program out of the

US Department of Education.<sup>15</sup> Employing the market logic of incentives, RTTT “dangled \$4.3 billion in federal stimulus funds” to encourage states to open more charter schools, tie teacher pay to test scores, and close low performing schools or hand them over to private management outfits.<sup>16</sup> And the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the 2015 successor to NCLB, while returning some powers to the states, continued the embrace of market principles: accountability through testing, sanctions for low performing schools, and fast track teacher education programs along the lines of Teach For America.<sup>17</sup>

Implicit and explicit in this consensus was the strong role of the federal government. Institutionally, the traditional local, public, and single-purpose domains of education policy were replaced by state/national, private, and general-purpose domains.<sup>18</sup> This shift, combined with the emphasis on accountability, standards, and assessment, also created a window for market-based reforms that marked the entrance of a new set of elite actors (well-resourced groups with access to decision makers), most notably venture philanthropists and think tanks. While the politics surrounding the new consensus was much more pluralistic than the older politics, it brought with it actors from outside the education arena whose visions of education were shaped largely by their experiences in the business and financial sectors, thus diverging sharply from past practices. At the heart of this new politics were questions about who should control education policy making (local, state, or federal government?), whose interests should be reflected in those decisions (students, teachers, parents, communities, businesses, and other private entities?), what education should look like (narrow curricula that cover tested subjects or broad-based, holistic education?) and the overall purposes of education (civic development, social mobility, or production of efficient workers?).<sup>19</sup> While issues of equity and local control, the basis of the old consensus, are certainly important, the questions that animate the new politics are at the heart of the entire education enterprise.

Contrary to grassroots activists, think tanks (e.g., American Enterprise Institute, Fordham Institute, Heritage Foundation) and venture philanthropists embraced a market-based approach to education reform. Often termed the “neoliberal” agenda, this effort is characterized by its emphasis on high-stakes standardized testing, accountability measures tied to student performance, public school closings, charter school

openings, championing of parental choice, and strong antiunion and antiteacher sentiment, among other things.<sup>20</sup> These various components reinforce each other, creating an apparently logical system. Charter schools empower parents by giving them choice while at the same time creating a competitive environment that, in theory, will lead to better schools, since existing ones will either improve or be forced to close. High-stakes testing becomes the mechanism whereby schools are evaluated, providing parents with information on school quality, so they can make informed choices, and district officials with leverage to close underperforming schools. Tying teacher evaluations to test scores both incentivizes teachers to improve their instruction and also holds them, as well as the school, accountable for education outcomes. While standardized tests are not a new development, the role that they play in teacher evaluations and in decisions to close schools is new.

The major promoters of this agenda include Bill Gates, the Walton family, and Eli Broad, who, through their foundations, have invested heavily in charter schools, teacher and administrator training, and the development of the Common Core State Standards, assessment tools, metrics, and education legislation at the state and national levels. More recently, Democrats for Education Reform joined the market-based reform movement, providing funds for candidates who support their education views and for policy research.<sup>21</sup> With its underlying logic that competition will improve education for all, it is not hard to see why market-based reforms appeal to members of the business community as well as to those on the more conservative end of the political spectrum. Appeals to principles of privatization and management practices have always held sway with those segments of the population that believe the private sector is more efficient than the public sector. Education is just another policy area that has been subsumed by that larger debate.

While market-based reforms are largely articulated at the national and state levels, implementation and its effects are very local. Specific components of the reform agenda, such as high-stakes testing and school closings, have elevated the stakes of the education battles in the minds of many constituent groups (teachers, parents, students, community groups), transforming latent observation into manifest participation. Moreover, the disproportionate influence wielded by wealthy donors, combined with their strong promotion of businesslike practices, raises

the specter of privatization of schools, another lightning rod for many constituents of public education. Thus, in less than three decades, education politics has gone from a relatively quiet consensus to a loudly contested pluralism, a shift that generates many research and policy questions.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GRASS ROOTS

There is considerable research on the role of elite actors such as national and state legislative bodies, mayors, governors, presidents, interest groups, and, more recently, think tanks and philanthropies in the new education landscape.<sup>22</sup> However, far less attention has been paid to the direct constituents of public education: teachers, students, parents, administrators, and communities.<sup>23</sup> Since policy is implemented at the local level, the most local being the classroom where teachers and students often “reinterpret” policy, focusing on these groups expands our understanding of what is *really* going on in the practice and politics of education.<sup>24</sup> Through empirical analysis in Philadelphia, Camden, Newark, several Philadelphia suburbs, and the state of New Jersey, this book provides a window into who these individuals and groups are, what they are seeking, how they mobilize around their goals, the challenges they encounter, and their successes and failures. Collectively, the case studies offer a two-tiered analysis of individual and group behavior addressing the following key questions: How do individuals become aware of issues? How do they interpret those issues? What motivates them to take action? What are the conditions that enable individual action to turn into collective action? And what are the conditions that help or hinder coalition building among groups?

Further, the examples of progressive union leaders in Chicago coming to power, the student protests in Boston against proposed budget cuts, the election of Mayor DeBlasio in New York with the strong support of education activists, and the significant growth of the opt-out movement, represent interesting new developments in the organizing landscape, including reconfigurations of past alliances (e.g., social justice-oriented teachers challenging more traditional leadership within their unions), the mobilization of new groups (e.g., suburban parents, school administrators), and the potential for new alliances (e.g., urban/suburban/rural, teachers and parents working together). New alliances

also include some unanticipated relationships. For example, resistance to the Common Core has brought together people from the far Right (Tea Party) and the Left, albeit for very different reasons. Similarly, supporters of market-based reforms can be found among Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives. In short, the current education landscape—which gives new meaning to the old adage “politics makes strange bedfellows”—has significant implications for how groups (and individuals) enter, engage, and negotiate in a restructured arena of education politics.

The literature also features many articles and books on what public education *should* look like in the United States, many painting pictures vastly different from those represented by market-based reforms.<sup>25</sup> The troubling question is, How do we get there? The proponents of market-based reforms are well resourced, have access to top-level decision makers, have framed their message in ways that resonate with deep-seated American values (individualism, freedom, choice, limited government), and can act swiftly. All of these advantages, however, morph into barriers for those seeking a different vision for public education. Thus, at its heart, this is a political question: How can parents, communities, teachers, unions, and students effectively mobilize to provide a countervailing force in the education landscape? What do their current efforts look like, and what can we learn from those efforts? Unfortunately, this has received significantly less scholarly attention.<sup>26</sup> In a sense, this area of investigation constitutes the “missing middle.”

*The Fight for America's Schools* builds on the small but growing literature on the role of grassroots activities in this new political landscape. Mark Warren and Karen Mapp's *A Match on Dry Grass* looks at such efforts in six cities, employing a community organizing framework.<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Henig and colleagues' work on New York City examines how parents and community residents have worked together to challenge mayoral control over education decision making.<sup>28</sup> Eric Guttstein and Pauline Lipman's examination of the recent toppling of the old guard in the Chicago Teachers Union by a progressive faction provides insight into the role that teachers can play in challenging the corporate reform agenda.<sup>29</sup>

The case studies in this book include research on all the different constituent groups that have been fighting to preserve education as a collective good—teachers, parents, students, administrators, and other

education activists. One of the book's major arguments is that an effective challenge to the market-based reform agenda will require these groups to work together. Examining the strategies that they employ, their motivations for getting involved, how they define the issues as well as their role in education policy, and their ultimate objectives for education reveal how these groups can coalesce and under what conditions. Moreover, organizing and coalition building do not occur in political or geographic vacuums. The cases are drawn from urban and suburban areas from three cities, two states, and one statewide effort to tease out the nuances created by differences in demographic composition, political structure, political history, and geographic scope, thereby providing a more robust analysis of coalition building across difference and within different political geographies. Some of the variables to be explored include types of organizations in each locality, how organizations and individuals define the issues, and the role of the unions. The comparisons identify how local coalition building can be tied to other localities and, ultimately, aggregated to regional and national levels.

The case studies extend the largely theoretical and historical analysis of Marion Orr and John Rogers's "streams of public engagement," particularly around community organizing, alliances, and social movements.<sup>30</sup> Using a concrete set of issues—charter schools, school closings, high-stakes testing, local control, and funding equity—the cases look at each of these streams, including the impacts of organizational, political, and socioeconomic contexts. Responding to the paucity of research on public engagement in education, Orr and Rogers also suggest several areas for further exploration, including who participates and what triggers their participation, what support entities are available to grassroots activists, and how individual engagement morphs into collective engagement. The case studies begin to answer some of those questions by looking at how specific individuals became involved in larger campaigns, how individual engagement turned into collective engagement, and the role of public policy and organizations in providing pathways and support for public engagement. Above and beyond the scholarly contributions, this book's significance lies in its attempts to shed light on how to preserve education as a collective good, a key—if not *the* key—component of our democracy.

## CASE STUDIES

Through case studies, we explore this new political landscape, examining these developments from organizational, coalition-building, networking, and social capital perspectives while identifying some of the policy windows available to these organizing efforts and the strategies for capitalizing on them. The case study chapters are based on original research conducted in Philadelphia and its surrounding suburbs, Newark and Camden, and in the state of New Jersey. The regional focus allows us to hold constant certain key contextual factors. Limiting the scope of variation in legal statutes and policy enactment and implementation allows for easier comparability. All three cities feature school districts that are under state control. Philadelphia, Newark, and Camden are representative of older industrial cities with histories of strong unions, machine-style politics, and racial tensions, especially around education policy. Moreover, all three cities have large black and Hispanic populations and histories of white flight from the public schools and the cities. And all are located in very close proximity to predominantly white, affluent suburban areas.

To the extent that politics play out differently in cities with weak or no unions, weak political parties, and different demographic compositions, the cases may be more representative of regional as opposed to national trends. However, also included in these case studies are suburban areas in New Jersey and Pennsylvania whose political and organizational contexts differ sharply from those of traditional East Coast cities: they do not have a history of machine politics; they have far fewer civic, nonprofit, and advocacy organizations; their governmental sectors are much smaller than those in cities; and there are far fewer publicly contested issues. Moreover, the cases offer lessons that can be applied nationally, such as those pertaining to broad-based coalition building across race, class, and geography; the relationship of issue definition to coalition building; and the importance of messaging and marketing.

While sharing many similarities, the cases also present significant variation. Philadelphia (population 1,567,442) is considerably larger than Newark (population 281,944), and Newark is nearly four times the size of Camden (population 76,119). With a poverty rate of 39.9 percent, Camden is also much poorer than the other two cities (Philadelphia's

poverty rate is 25.4 percent and Newark's is 29.7 percent).<sup>31</sup> Placed under state control from 2002 to 2010, the "biggest takeover in American history" did not lead to any significant improvements in Camden's economic situation.<sup>32</sup>

Education levels reflect economic levels. In Philadelphia, 82 percent of the adult population has a high school degree and 25.4 percent has a college degree or more; in Newark, 72.3 percent and 13.3 percent, respectively; and in Camden, 67.6 percent and 8 percent, respectively.<sup>33</sup> The economic and educational diversity in Philadelphia and Newark may shape its politics, especially around education, in ways that are absent in Camden.

State-level data also suggest significant variation. In 2015, New Jersey had a median income of \$72,093 and Pennsylvania \$53,599. Income disparities between the two states are reflected in education attainment levels, with 36.8 percent of New Jersey's population having a bachelor's degree or higher versus Pennsylvania's 28.6 percent.<sup>34</sup>

This variation helps broaden an understanding of how individuals and organizations come together, or not, over common interests. The cases provide a microcosm of what is happening across the country. The empirical research, which combines interviews, participant observation, and documentary and archival investigation, is grounded in scholarly literature from a broad range of disciplines, including anthropology, education, political science, public policy, and sociology.

## THE ORIGINS AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

*The Fight for America's Schools* grew out of conversations among a small group of researchers who were interested in exploring the grassroots activities around education issues in Philadelphia and New Jersey. Some of them were involved with education activist groups prior to and during their research for this book; however, rather than that involvement clouding objectivity, it enhanced access and encouraged candor from activists interviewed. Moreover, through such work, these scholar-activists have gained deeper insights into how coalitions are developed and movements formed, the challenges these efforts face, and how they address or fail to address them. These insights are crucial to understanding how these coalitions work and how political activism informs policy.

In chapter 1, Barbara Ferman and Nicholas Palazzolo examine the larger context of grassroots activities, both its challenges and opportunities. The challenges include issues of race, past and current practices of teacher unions, resource imbalances, a context of perpetual crises, and the neoliberal mind-set that shapes the conversation and the alternatives that are considered.<sup>35</sup> The market-based reform agenda is taking hold in school districts where the student body is predominantly black and brown and very low income. Proponents argue that charter schools provide viable alternatives for parents and that standardized testing holds schools accountable, and challenging these assertions is tantamount to promoting poor education for students of color. Ferman and Pazzolo show how traditional labor union practices, which tend to focus on wages, benefits, and working conditions to the exclusion of education equity and other social justice issues, are out of step with new education/political realities and have estranged them from communities of color.<sup>36</sup> The fact that education always appears to be in crisis creates a sense of urgency that advantages those who have deep resources, access to decision makers, and an ability to act quickly. Given these constraints, the authors ask, what are the opportunities available to grassroots activists, who have far fewer resources and access points than the proponents of market-based reforms?

In chapter 2, Stephen Danley and Julia Sass Rubin provide a comparative analysis of community responses to state-imposed school reforms in Camden and Newark. At first glance, the two cities have much in common. Public schools in both are under state control, with superintendents appointed by and accountable to the governor. Both cities have experienced significant increases in the number of privately managed charter schools, the firing of teachers and staff, and the handover of public school buildings to charter school chains. However, community responses to state efforts have differed. Newark residents aggressively resisted the forced school closings and the loss of local control over education decision making, while Camden's response has been much quieter. Danley and Rubin explore the role that political structure, context, and history play in shaping the opportunities for and challenges to political mobilization, coalition building, and policy advocacy around education.

In chapter 3, Elaine Simon, Rand Quinn, Marissa Martino Golden, and Jody Cohen examine how parents, students, teachers, and community

groups adopted new practices and approaches to more effectively operate in the changed landscape of education policy and practice in Philadelphia. This new landscape includes the 2001 state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia and the subsequent installation of the School Reform Commission, the increasing number of charter schools, and the constant performance assessments mandated by state and federal statutes. The authors explore how a culture of activism in the city spawned a variety of organizing strategies that complemented each other, thereby allowing activists to operate on multiple fronts.

In chapter 4, Barbara Ferman offers a comparative case study of the opt-out movement in Philadelphia and several of its suburbs, where parents, students, teachers, and administrators have joined the growing movement that is challenging the proliferation of high-stakes testing. She explores why parents opted their children out of testing, how and why they became involved in the larger movement, the strategies they employed, the concerns that were raised, and how they defined education issues.

In chapter 5, Julia Sass Rubin looks at statewide organizing through a case study of Save Our Schools NJ (SOSNJ), a grassroots, all-volunteer organization comprised of parents and other supporters of public education that is advocating for the rights of every child in New Jersey to have access to a high-quality public education. SOSNJ provides a very rich case study of how a grassroots, parental organizing effort can bridge divides of geography (urban/suburban), race, class, and political ideology to build the political strength necessary to successfully shape public policy.

In chapter 6, Barbara Ferman draws on the lessons from the case studies to better understand the implications of the new politics of education and how “ordinary” citizens and groups with limited resources can shape policy in an arena dominated by heavily resourced interests. Using community organizing, issue definition, and opportunity window frameworks, she explores questions around pathways into education politics, individual and collective engagement, conditions that support coalition building, and obstacles and challenges she outlined in chapter 1. Understanding the political landscape is a necessary step along the road to meaningful policy change.

For too long public education has failed low-income, minority, and special needs populations. Yet, as the case study chapters illuminate,

many of the market-based reforms are not leading to improvements and, in some cases, may be decreasing the quality of public education while harming local school budgets. In chapter 7, Susan DeJarnatt and Barbara Ferman assess the competing logics of market efficiency and democratic responsiveness as foundations for public education, concluding with an examination of alternative visions for public education.

There *are* better ways to provide education and to help all children succeed. America's students deserve it, and society will benefit economically, socially, and politically from a better educated populace. However, accomplishing that requires navigating the new landscape of education politics. The challenges presented are steep, but grassroots activists have asserted themselves, engaging in new alliances, adopting creative tactics, and strategically reframing issues. Their experiences provide a window into the politics of preserving education as a collective good that is democratically controlled, adequately funded, and responsive to the needs of all children.