Our name has changed, but our mission has not

Welcome to the fall 2001 issue. Our first two issues, in the spring and summer of 2001, ran under the banner Education Matters. With this issue, in order to avoid conflicts with other entities using that name, we become Education Next. Our commitment to publishing incisive commentary and research of the highest caliber remains as firm as ever.

Why Education Next? To our minds, Next nicely characterizes a journal that is forward looking, that thinks beyond the status quo. More subtly, Next suggests that education's time has come, that this sector is ripe for major change.

The United States continues to become more open, dynamic, flexible, and responsive. Civil rights activists broke down classifications by color and nationality. Women's organizations restructured the workplace. Transformed communications give the quick an edge over the large. Disciplined by global markets, firms now must emphasize productivity and innovation or they die. At the same time, environmental regulations have asked businesses to pay as much attention to externalities as to profits. The citizen and customer are increasingly in charge.

Education is next. In years past, school reform meant bigger schools, more "comprehensive" systems, and more tightly centralized control. Today's reform trends are quite the opposite. Expanded school choice, whether by charter, magnet, homeschooling, voucher, or inter-district arrangements, is shifting control downward— to teachers, parents, and local administrators. Education is becoming a modern organization, accountable for its results and performance—both to its clients and to the larger society.

No one can be sure where all this will wind up. But we are certain of an intense and fascinating debate, as ideas sparkle, policies are tried, programs are evaluated. Our goal in Education Next is to keep you abreast of what is happening—and to discuss what should be happening. In this issue we explore four of the liveliest topics in this debate: accountability, choice, teacher unions, and education research.

The Houston story celebrates the marriage of a state accountability system and an urban school board and superintendent with a laser-like focus on reform. However, David Steiner and Lauren Resnick, in separate essays, warn us not to draw strong conclusions prematurely. What may appear to be striking gains on minimum-competency tests may leave us well short of where the nation wants and needs to be.

The impact of choice on civil society also gets serious attention. David Campbell's research piece finds reason to praise the nation's largest private system of schools, the Catholic schools, for their ability to graduate students with a healthy regard for our political traditions and a commitment to social action, but he also finds signs that private schools with other religious affiliations may not have such excellent records. In the Forum, Diane Ravitch and Nathan Glazer show how the very concept of a common culture has evaporated in the public schools even as Steiner worries about the testing culture that may be replacing it.

What is the next role that teacher unions will play? Opinions, not surprisingly, differ sharply. Terry Moe reminds us that the very purpose of a union is to create and protect a monopoly. Charles Kerchner and Adam Urbanski argue, however, that teachers are professionals and that today's teacher unions have genuine potential for reform.

If education's next steps are to be rooted in quality information, we need to strengthen our systems for creating and distributing knowledge. Thomas Cook's examination of education research raises serious questions about its scientific quality. Senior editor Chester Finn wonders whether Education Week's annual effort to survey the quality of American schools has the objectivity one should expect.

All issues of the journal—by whichever name—are available on newsstands or by subscription. We also invite you to visit our new website, www.educationnext.org, where you will find unabridged versions of many articles.

—THE EDITORS

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K–12 education, but Education Next partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.