

August 2010

The Parent Trigger: A Model for Transforming Education

**By Joseph L. Bast, Bruno Behrend,
Ben Boychuk, and Marc Oestreich^{*}**

The Parent Trigger is an innovation in education reform recently passed into law in California. Briefly put, if half the parents whose children attend a failing public school sign a petition requesting reform of the school, the school must either shut down, become a charter school, or undergo one of two other types of reform.

The Parent Trigger concept is the creation of the Los Angeles Parents Union, a group of self-described progressives led by Ben Austin, a Democrat whose previous employers include President Bill Clinton, Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan, and Hollywood director-turned-political-activist Rob Reiner. Austin was also a consultant to Green Dot Charter Schools, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit charter school chain that has taken over several failed public schools, including the notorious Locke High School in South Los Angeles, near Watts. In March 2010, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) appointed Austin to a four-year term on the state's 11-member board of education.

The parent trigger has the potential to turbo-charge the transformation of education in every state by bringing grassroots “regime change” to public education.

The Parent Trigger passed by just one vote in the California Senate and one vote in the Assembly. Schwarzenegger signed it into law on January 7, 2010 as part of a package of special legislation designed to improve California's prospects in the first round of the federal Race to the Top grant competition.

^{*} Joseph Bast is president of The Heartland Institute; Ben Boychuk is managing editor of The Heartland Institute's *School Reform News*; Bruno Behrend is director of Heartland's Center for School Reform; Marc Oestreich is education legislative specialist at The Heartland Institute. More complete bios appear on page 27.

While California didn't make the cut in Race to the Top, the Parent Trigger is currently the law in the Golden State. According to the Web site of the Los Angeles Parents Union (www.parentrevolution.org), five schools currently have petition drives underway to transform their schools. These parents are moving forward on the Parent Trigger absent legal clarity, an indication of the demand for reform. At least one other state – Connecticut – is considering similar legislation. (Connecticut passed a wide-ranging education reform bill in May, but the final compromise legislation did not include a Parent Trigger provision.)

The Parent Trigger is unique. Unlike most reform proposals based on empowering parents, the Parent Trigger originates from activists on the political left, not from the center-right coalition. This pedigree creates an opportunity for building a successful coalition that can advance reform. Conservatives and libertarians should support the Parent Trigger because it could allow parents to choose charters or even vouchers (in the version described later in this paper); liberals and progressives should support it because it empowers low-income and minority parents to control the reform path their schools follow.

The Parent Trigger idea is also sufficiently malleable to accommodate different political realities in cities and states across the country.

The Parent Trigger idea is also sufficiently malleable to accommodate different political realities in cities and states across the country. In California and in proposed legislation in Connecticut, regulations would empower school districts to veto efforts by parents, and two of the four options seem tailored to the needs of bureaucracies more than children. More reform-minded states

such as Indiana, Michigan, and Minnesota might choose to reject those regulations and replace the weakest reform options with something much stronger, such as vouchers.

The Parent Trigger has the potential to turbo-charge the transformation of education in every state by bringing grassroots “regime change” to public education. Is the Parent Trigger right for your state? This policy brief explains the promise and possible pitfalls of the Parent Trigger.

1. California Parent Trigger - Basics

The Parent Trigger is created by Section 2, Article 3 (commencing with Section 53300) of California's Education Code. The full text appears in Appendix 1. The legislation empowers parents or guardians whose children attend failing public schools to “trigger” one of four school intervention models by signing a petition to reform that school.

By empowering parents, the Parent Trigger forces school districts to undertake dramatic changes that education bureaucracies would otherwise oppose. A parent's primary interest is the best possible education for his or her children, while an education bureaucracy has divided and

conflicting interests to serve parents and children while also serving teacher unions, other employees, political overseers, and career bureaucrats.¹

Concerned and engaged parents from all walks of life support the idea of a Parent Trigger. More than 3,000 parents, many of them African-American and Latino, rallied in Los Angeles in August 2009 for empowerment. Thousands more sent letters, made calls, organized demonstrations, and testified before the California legislature in support of the statewide law.

Lydia Grant, a parent in the Los Angeles suburb of Sunland-Tujunga, is leading a Parent Trigger petition drive at Mt. Gleason Middle School. “There is an unsafe atmosphere at this school that is spilling over into the community,” Grant explained to the *Los Angeles Daily News*. “People are tired of it and we want to see change.”²

Supporters are not bound by a particular ideology or political party. Many of the activists who conceived the Parent Trigger in 2009 campaigned and voted for Barack Obama in 2008. They realize America’s public school system is broken because it isn’t designed to succeed. America’s \$400 billion public education system exists

America’s \$400 billion public education system exists primarily to serve grownups – bureaucrats, unions and other special interests – not kids or parents.

primarily to serve grown-ups – bureaucrats, unions, and other special interests – not kids.

Who opposes the Parent Trigger? Principally, teacher unions. Because many parents will likely choose to have their schools convert to charters and most charter schools are not unionized, powerful unions like the California Teachers Association view parental empowerment as a threat. Some charters, including Green Dot, have their own unions, but these are unaffiliated with the established public employee unions such as the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers.

The unions are so afraid of the Parent Trigger, they are willing to use underhanded tactics to stop it. When parents in the Los Angeles Unified School District organized behind the Parent Trigger idea last year, the powerful United Teachers of Los Angeles union began circulating rumors in Hispanic neighborhoods that parents would be forced to pay tuition at a charter school and could even be deported if they signed a petition.³ The union called the proposal “the lynch mob provision,” which revealed contempt for parents as well as tone deafness. Parent Trigger supporters are mostly poor, mostly African-American and Latino parents who simply want a

¹ See John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990).

² Connie Llanos, “Parents pulling ‘trigger’ on school,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, February 14, 2010.

³ “L.A. school leaders, community groups to debunk inflammatory flier aimed at undocumented parents,” LA Now blog, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2009/11>, November 10, 2009.

better education for their children. They are being compared to white supremacists by the well-funded, politically powerful teachers union.

Parents eligible to initiate a Parent Trigger petition are those with children enrolled in a failing school, as defined by the California School Code, or in feeder schools (neighborhood primary or middle schools) that send children to a failing school. Schools must be labeled a “program improvement school” for more than three consecutive years for failing to meet federal academic benchmarks, have an Academic Performance Index (the state’s benchmark test) of less than 800,⁴ and be among the lowest 5 percent of schools in California. A

Eligible parents are those with children either enrolled in a failing school, as defined by the California School Code.

further absolute cap on the number of participating schools is set at 75 statewide.

If 50 percent of eligible parents sign the petition, the local education agency (LEA) – usually a school district – must undertake one (or more) of the four “school intervention models” prescribed under the Race to the Top program defined in Appendix C of the Race to the Top Overview in the Federal Register⁵ and incorporated by reference into California’s Parent Trigger legislation. Briefly, the four models are:

- Closure - Close the school, fire the staff, and send the children to better-performing schools nearby.
- Restart - Convert the school to an independent charter school.
- Turnaround - Replace school leadership and grant new leaders more flexibility.
- Transformation - Turnaround model with added layers of bureaucratic oversight.

Each option is described in more detail and analyzed in Part 2 of this paper. Once parents submit the petition with sufficient signatures, the Parent Trigger law says the LEA:

... shall implement the option requested by the parents unless, in a regularly scheduled public hearing, the local educational agency makes a finding in writing stating the reason it cannot implement the specific recommended option and instead designates in writing which of the other options described in this section it will implement in the subsequent school year consistent with requirements specified in federal regulations and guidelines for schools subject to restructuring under Section 1116(b)(8) of the federal Elementary

⁴ Academic Performance Index (API) scores in California are a compilation of a school’s state standardized test scores, on a scale of 200 to 1,000. The California Department of Education expects all schools eventually to obtain APIs of at least 800.

⁵ *Federal Register* / Vol. 74, No. 221 / Wednesday, November 18, 2009 / Notices - Appendix C, School Intervention Models, pp. 59866-7.

and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 et seq.) and regulations and guidelines for the four interventions.⁶

While this process contains some bureaucratic hurdles that could frustrate parents seeking accountability and local control, it is a stark departure from existing school governance. Voting for school board members and attending board meetings typically are the only avenues open to concerned parents today. Most people who have experience attempting to create improvement by such activities know they often are fruitless. The ability to initiate changes in school governance by having 50 percent of the school's parents or guardians sign a petition is a dramatic advance in parent empowerment. Properly implemented, the Parent Trigger could provide real, not illusory, parental control.

2. California Parent Trigger - Details

California's Parent Trigger legislation appears in Appendix 1. The legislation did not provide a clear set of instructions or detailed procedures for initiating a petition to trigger reform of a school.

On July 15, 2010, the California State Board of Education promulgated and passed "emergency regulations" related to the Parent Trigger.⁷ A public comment period was open July 16 through July 23. The regulations define terms, clarify the signature process, and provide standards for the minimum amount of information that must be contained in the petitions.⁸ The regulations also add a fifth reform option to the four incorporated by reference to the *Federal Register*.

If half of the parents eligible to sign the petition do so, the district must act. The intrinsic simplicity of the process makes it easy to engage parents in a campaign to change their children's school.

If half of the parents eligible to sign the petition do so, the district must act. The intrinsic simplicity of the process makes it easy to engage parents in a campaign to change their children's school. However, many questions are left unanswered by the sparsely worded legislation. For which transformation strategy should the parents petition? What level of specificity should the petition have? What happens once they get enough signatures?

⁶ California Education Code, Sec. 2, Article 3 - Parent Empowerment, Section 53300.

⁷ See "State board OKs open enrollment for 1,000 schools in Program Improvement; Parent petitions to require reforms in underachieving schools also authorized," http://www.csba.org/NewsAndMedia/Publications/CASchoolNews/2010/July/ElectronicOnly/SBE_OpenEnroll.aspx; and Parent Empowerment Emergency Regulations, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lr/rr/parentemp.asp>

⁸ For example, for each child attending the failing school, the regulations state only one eligible parent or guardian may sign a petition.

To add more uncertainty to the process, the Parent Trigger law allows the school district to supercede the parent's choice of reform so long as it produces a reason "in writing" as a result of a "regularly scheduled meeting" of its board. Giving school boards the power to veto the demands of the parents could undermine the whole Parent Trigger ideal by making the petition little more than a gesture of parental frustration.

Parents interested in using California's Parent Trigger should understand that their school board could choose unilaterally to reject their petition. Parents should be prepared to document their case for transformation and present it to board members, the press, and civic and business leaders as petition signatures are being gathered. School reform advocates in other states should consider strengthening any Parent Trigger proposal put forth in their state by removing the veto power of school boards.

3. Choosing an Option

As mentioned above, the four intervention options defined in the federal Race to the Top program are incorporated by reference into California's Parent Trigger legislation. The actual language from the legislation appears in Appendix 2. The four models are school closure, restart (charter), turnaround, and transformation.

This is a kind of school choice that operates in the private sector, where schools that fail to impress parents and attract students are forced to close their doors.

Closing persistently failing schools and transferring students to higher-performing schools within the district or turning schools into charter schools are relatively straightforward and robust reforms. The other two models are complex procedures that could mire school districts in years of hearings, meetings, reorganization plans,

contracts for outside consultants, and myriad other activities of questionable benefit to children. We analyze each option below.

School Closure Model

The school closure model calls for closing the school and sending its pupils to "higher-achieving" schools in the district. This might be a viable alternative where higher-performing schools exist in the proximity of the failing school, but this won't always be the case.

School closure rapidly enforces accountability by closing failing schools and placing students in better schools immediately. This is a kind of school choice that operates in the private sector, where schools that fail to impress parents and attract students are forced to close their doors,

while those that satisfy parents are allowed to succeed. Extensive research shows how the possibility of failure and rewards for success lead to higher student academic achievement.⁹

It may be argued that closing schools and relocating students is unfair to the faculty and staff of failing schools. Perhaps with more resources, or outside assistance, or more time, or the right leader, or with less outside interference from politicians and bureaucrats, the school would improve. This appeal for a second, or third, or fourth chance will resonate with many parents and community leaders. Indeed, such appeals have prevented “radical” reforms such as vouchers and tax credits from becoming law in most of the country for many years.

It is important that school closure be an option under the Parent Trigger – and not be viewed only as “an absolute last resort” – precisely because virtual immunity to closure has fostered a climate of low achievement in so many school systems. Nothing focuses attention on student achievement as effectively as a bona fide threat of closure. Closure in some situations is the only way to get around tenure laws that prevent the termination of incompetent or even potentially dangerous individuals who work for school systems.

While moving children into new schools can be disruptive for the child, parents, and teachers, that cost must be weighed against the potential benefit for the individual child as well as other children. Most transferring students recover whatever academic ground they lose after one or two years in their new school and then outperform their counterparts who remained behind in the failing school.¹⁰ All students, including those not enrolled in a failing school, benefit when even a small number of schools are closed due to the signal such closures sends that failure will not be tolerated.

In cases where failure is pervasive, this is like rearranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic: The new schools are not likely to be much better than the old schools.

The bigger potential problem with the school closure option is that students are relocated only to other public schools in their district. In cases where failure is pervasive, this is like rearranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic: The new schools are not likely to be much better than the old schools. Closure is more likely to benefit students if their parents are given a wider choice of schools in which their children can enroll: public schools outside their district, charter schools, and even private schools that agree to accept tuition paid by the school district. This final option is further explored later in this report.

⁹ See Herbert Walberg, *Advancing Student Achievement* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2010); and Herbert Walberg, *School Choice: The Results* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2007).

¹⁰ Caroline M. Hoxby and Jonah E. Rockoff, “Findings from the City of Big Shoulders,” *Education Next*, Fall 2005.

Restart Model

The federal guidelines for the restart model consist of only five sentences:

A restart model is one in which an LEA (usually a local school district) converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO) that has been selected through a rigorous review process. (A CMO is a non-profit organization that operates or manages charter schools by centralizing or sharing certain functions and resources among schools. An EMO is a for-profit or non-profit organization that provides “whole-school operation” services to an LEA.) A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school.¹¹

Charter schools are a popular and effective reform, free from many of the rules and regulations that often contribute to a public school’s failure.

Charter schools are public schools operated by private entities (for-profit or nonprofit) under a charter for a limited amount of time. They are subject to performance standards set forth in the charter, which typically include minimum graduation and academic achievement levels and other outputs.

Charter schools are a popular and effective reform.¹² They are free from many of the rules and regulations that often contribute to a public school’s failure. Charters may use a different curriculum, or emphasize certain subjects such as languages or science. Charter school officials often may hire and fire teachers and staff at will, which is why the teacher unions have opposed them so strongly.¹³

The choice of charter operation under the Race to the Top guidelines is limited to those organizations selected from a “rigorous review process.” This does not constitute an onerous restriction on parents or LEAs that choose this route, and it may help avoid some of the problems that afflict schools started by individuals and organizations who may be long on enthusiasm but short on capital and experience. Experienced charter school operators include Green Dot, the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), Heritage Charter Academies, Rocketship Learning Centers, and Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) Promise Academies. Their success has given them

¹¹ *Federal Register*, supra note 5.

¹² Caroline Hoxby, “Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Differences,” December 2004, http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/pdf/HoxbyCharters_Dec2004.pdf.

¹³ Howard Blume, “Teacher unions and charter school advocates square off over election,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 2010.

access to the start-up capital and human resources that are critical for the success of new schools.¹⁴

California parents who are eligible to initiate and execute the Parent Trigger should promote the conversion to a charter as the option most likely to improve the education their children effectively and quickly. Charters enjoy broad public support across the political spectrum while school closings do not. With the existence of an experienced pool of charter operators, it is relatively easy to bring in proven and streamlined management for the school.

California parents who are eligible to initiate and execute the Parent Trigger should promote the conversion to a charter as the option most likely to improve the education of their children effectively and quickly.

Turnaround Model

The turnaround model is designed to change the management of a failing school by mandating the replacement of principals and giving their replacements expanded “operational flexibility” to manage the schools. The federal regulations require LEAs to perform nine activities under a turnaround model:

- (i) Replace the principal and grant the [new] principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach in order to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates;
- (ii) Using locally adopted competencies to measure the effectiveness of staff who can work within the turnaround environment to meet the needs of students, (A) Screen all existing staff and rehire no more than 50 percent; and (B) Select new staff;
- (iii) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in the turnaround school;
- (iv) Provide staff with ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school’s comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure that they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies;

¹⁴ Monica Higgins and Frederick M. Hess, “The Challenges for Charter Schools,” *Education Outlook*, April 2009.

(v) Adopt a new governance structure, which may include, but is not limited to, requiring the school to report to a new “turnaround office” in the LEA or SEA, hire a “turnaround leader” who reports directly to the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer, or enter into a multi-year contract with the LEA or SEA to obtain added flexibility in exchange for greater accountability;

(vi) Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and “vertically aligned” from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards;

(vii) Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students;

(viii) Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in this notice); and

(ix) Provide appropriate social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students.¹⁵

No doubt some of the turnaround activities are good ideas, but mandating that school districts adopt them doesn’t mean they will be embraced with enthusiasm or be successful if implemented.

No doubt some of these activities are good ideas and have research backing, but mandating that school districts adopt them doesn’t mean they will be embraced with enthusiasm or be successful if implemented. Research on turnaround strategies paints a disappointing picture. A recent study by the Brookings Institution concluded: “The science of turnarounds is weak and devoid of practical, effective strategies for educators to

employ.”¹⁶ The study compared eighth grade test scores from 1,156 schools in California from 1989 to 2009 and found them to be “remarkably stable” – in other words, stagnant. According to the report: “Of schools in the bottom quartile in 1989 – the state’s lowest performers—nearly two-thirds (63.4 percent) scored in the bottom quartile again in 2009. The odds of a bottom quartile school’s rising to the top quartile were about one in seventy (1.4 percent).”¹⁷

Hiring new staff, spending more tax dollars on tutoring, replacing school administrators, extending school hours, and similar changes have not resulted in significant improvements in student performance. These strategies all require additional tax dollars to flow into schools: a

¹⁵ *Federal Register*, supra note 5.

¹⁶ Tom Loveless, “The 2009 Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning?” Brookings Institution, March 2010.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

“reform” the education establishment favors but research shows has little or no effect on student achievement.¹⁸

The turnaround model is weak and expensive medicine compared to the school closure and restart options. Merely replacing the existing school management with another version of mostly bureaucratic control offers no guarantee that outcomes for children would improve. This “musical chairs” approach to reform differs little from business-as-usual for many school districts.

Merely replacing the existing school management with another version of mostly bureaucratic control offers no guarantee that outcomes for children would improve.

Transformation Model

The transformation model is similar to the turnaround model, but even more prescriptive. Local education authorities are required to:

- (A) Replace the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation model;
- (B) Use rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals
- (C) Identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and high-school graduation rates and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so;
- (D) Provide staff with ongoing, high quality, job-embedded professional development (e.g., regarding subject specific pedagogy, instruction that reflects a deeper understanding of the community served by the school, or differentiated instruction) that is aligned with the school’s comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies; and
- (E) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school.¹⁹

¹⁸ Eric A. Hanushek, “Spending on Schools,” in *A Primer on American Schools* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2001), pp. 69-88.

¹⁹ *Federal Register*, supra note 5.

The *Federal Register* then proceeds to lay out a panoply of “required activities,” mandating “permissible” and “impermissible” “systems” and “strategies.” The complexity of this model is illustrated by the fact it takes up more than half of the text of the entire Appendix C outlining the four models. The other “bureaucracy-heavy” option, the turnaround model, takes up about a quarter. Both the restart and school closure models together take up only one-tenth of the text of Appendix C.

Parents would be right to question whether all these activities and strategies differ much from what school officials claim to be doing already, and have been doing for years.

Parents would be right to question whether these activities and strategies differ much from what school officials claim to be doing already, and have been doing for years to “reform” their schools. Thousands of academics have made careers out of studying “what works” in education, and tens of thousands of consultants and school administrators use their suggestions and

vocabulary to attempt to improve schools ... but drop-out rates remain stubbornly high and academic achievement scores disappointingly low.

As California state Sen. Gloria Romero, a Democrat representing Los Angeles and author of the Parent Trigger bill, told the *Los Angeles Times*, “I’m sorry – after a certain point you are no longer credible on the promise that you’ll fix it. Parents want change and opportunity now.”²⁰

Alternative Governance Model

The Alternative Governance Model was added to the Parent Trigger by the State Board of Education when it promulgated “emergency regulations” for implementing the sparsely worded legislation.

Alternative governance is a reform option already in use in California.²¹ It was added to the Parent Trigger to accommodate school districts already in the process of reform prior to passage of the Parent Trigger, and to give parents the authority to trigger that option. The Alternative Governance Model closely resembles the Turnaround and Transformation models.

²⁰ Connie Llanos, *supra* note 2.

²¹ “Alternative governance is one in which an LEA institutes any other major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms, such as significant changes in the school’s staffing and governance, to improve student academic achievement in the school and that has substantial promise of enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress as defined in the State plan under Section 6311(b)(2) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.” Chapter 5.2.5 Parent Empowerment, Subchapter 1, Article 1-General Provisions, § 4807.

4. California Parent Trigger – Flaws and Fixes

California’s Parent Trigger is an innovative and positive piece of public policy, but it is not perfect. Five flaws in particular are likely to limit its effectiveness. In this chapter we describe the flaws and present reforms that would fix them.

Five flaws are likely to limit the effectiveness of California’s Parent Trigger.

Undermining Parent Control

The biggest flaw in California’s Parent Trigger is that it allows local school authorities to override the option chosen by parents. The local education agency (school district) can simply produce a reason “in writing” as to why it “cannot implement the specified recommendation” made by parents. The district can then pick another of the four options, which it must begin to implement in the next school year. The law does not allow for any appeals process for the parents to enforce their wishes.

On paper, this may seem to be a reasonable check-and-balance on citizen initiative. The California law as written, however, gives the district power to kill charter conversions. Any district bureaucracy intent on asserting its prerogatives can circumvent the “option requested” by parents simply by announcing at a “regularly scheduled public hearing” that it has “made a finding in writing” that it cannot implement the parents’ first choice. Once a school board makes its finding, the parents’ options appear to be closed. California parents and policymakers should consider removing this preemption of parent power.

Connecticut was poised to repeat California’s mistakes ... and even make them worse. A bill by state Sen. Jason Bartlett (D-Danbury) would have given school boards more authority to choose the turnaround model. If parents made a decision and the local school board disagreed, the final decision would have fallen to the state Education Commissioner. As noted earlier, Connecticut passed an education reform measure in May, but that law did not include a Parent Trigger.

To make sure parents aren’t encumbered by rules intended to frustrate their efforts, parents and legislators should monitor carefully the recently released “emergency regulations” for implementing the Parent Trigger in California. For parents and legislators in other states who might be interested in promoting the parent trigger concept, some specific recommendations appear in Part 5 below.

Eligibility Restrictions

The Parent Trigger places severe restrictions on which schools are subject to the law. As reported earlier, schools must be labeled a “program improvement school” for more than three consecutive years for failing to meet federal academic benchmarks, have an Academic Performance Index (the state’s benchmark test) of less than 800, and be among the lowest 5 percent of schools in California. A further absolute cap on the number of participating schools is set at just 75 statewide.

Once again, Connecticut was poised to repeat California’s mistake. Bartlett’s bill would have capped the Parent Trigger program at only 25 schools and limit eligibility to schools that were classified as persistently failing for five years rather than three years. Even with this restrictive definition of eligible schools, the cap would have left 160 failing schools with no reform option.

Similarly arbitrary caps on the number of charter schools have led to a nationwide waiting list of approximately 365,000 students.²² Without caps of this sort we could see more than 1,000 additional charter schools.

The eligibility restrictions in the California Parent Trigger appear to be concessions to the powerful adult interest groups that dominate the school reform debate.

It would be more in keeping with the spirit of parental empowerment that parents, rather than state and federal bureaucrats, be allowed to determine which schools are “failing” and therefore subject to the Parent Trigger. If half of the parents of children attending a school believe their children would be better off if the school were closed, converted into a

charter school, or otherwise transformed, isn’t that enough evidence that change should occur?

The eligibility restrictions in the California Parent Trigger appear to be concessions to the powerful adult interest groups that dominate the school reform debate: teachers unions, principals, school district administrators, and school boards. If we believe parents know best and care most about what is in their children’s interest, then the restrictions and caps ought to be removed.

Federal Meddling

California’s Parent Trigger law is tied to the federal Race to the Top initiative, which is funded by the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Although promoted as “an unprecedented investment in cutting-edge ideas that will produce the next generation of school

²² “Caps on Charter Schools,” National Association for Public Charter Schools, <http://www.publiccharters.org/node/45>, last viewed July 29, 2010.

reforms,”²³ Race to the Top is actually quite prescriptive, as the description of the turnaround and transformation models demonstrates. By incorporating by reference federal rules and guidelines, California’s legislators have made school reform in their state subject to the past and future judgments of Congress and Washington bureaucrats.

The connection to Race to the Top also has budget implications. While California’s Parent Trigger has no expiration date, Race to the Top is currently a four-year program. With the national government deeply in debt and major political battles over spending and entitlements on the horizon, how likely is it that federal funds will be available in five years ... or even three or four years?

California’s Parent Trigger would be better if it incorporated the description of the four options in the legislation without reference to Race to the Top. That would also give legislators an opportunity to revise and improve those options, as we begin to discuss next.

Charter School Funding

Essential to the success of the Parent Trigger model is funding equity among the options available to parents. If parents choose the charter school option, under current policies in California they may find that per-student funding will be less than if they hadn’t “pulled the trigger.” With federal funds flowing to schools that choose the turnaround and transformation models, it is also likely that those choices will be unfairly favored with higher spending.

How much charter schools in California receive in public funding is a complex issue, with funding coming from a half-dozen different sources.²⁴ A 2005 study by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation of funding for charter schools nationwide found on average, the funding gap between traditional public schools and charters is 22 percent, or \$1,800 per pupil.²⁵ The discrepancies are much larger in most urban school districts, where the gap approached \$2,200 per pupil. In cities such as San Diego and Atlanta, charters receive 40 percent less funding than traditional public schools.

Essential to the success of the Parent Trigger model is funding equity between the options available to parents.

²³ Arne Duncan, quoted in “U.S. Secretary of Education Announces National Competition to Invest in Innovation,” news release, U.S. Department of Education, October 6, 2009.

²⁴ Charter School Development Center, “California Charter School Finance in a Nutshell,” n.d., http://www.cacharterschools.org/pdf_files/Charter%20Funding%20Basics.pdf.

²⁵ Hassel, Bryan and Speakman, Sheree (2005). “Charter School Funding: Inequity’s Next Frontier.” Thomas B. Fordham Institute, August 2005. <http://www.edexcellence.net/doc/Charter%20School%20Funding%202005%20FINAL.pdf>

The Parent Trigger gives California lawmakers and charter school advocates a way to achieve funding parity with other public schools. A simple provision should be added to the trigger law saying per-pupil spending shall not be reduced if parents choose the restart/charter school option.

Limited Options

California's Parent Trigger gives parents of children attending failing public schools four reform options: closure, restart (charter school), turnaround, and transformation. Closure assumes nearby schools are better than the failing school, which often is not the case. The last two options, as we have argued, may give only the appearance of real reform. While full of buzzwords and promoted by an army of "experts" eager to get paid to share their theories and oversee the implementation of their recommendations, the record shows these options are the least likely to actually improve graduation rates and academic achievement.

What is left is restart — conversion to charter schools. The idea that parents ought to be able to petition to have their schools become charter schools is a good one, and it offers a novel way around political opposition to closing failing public schools and opening new charter schools. Letting parents decide gives them ownership of the decision and a role in the process of choosing a charter operator. Many politicians would be grateful to be removed from the political controversy that often accompanies school closings.

Many politicians would be grateful to be removed from the political controversy that often accompanies school closings.

We think California's Parent Trigger would be improved simply by removing the final two options. This would avoid the "easy out" the current law gives to local school district bureaucrats and school boards. But far better would be *replacing* turnaround and transformation with vouchers for parents to

use to pay tuition at the schools of their choice.²⁶ Empowering parents to choose a different school for their children is in keeping with the parent-empowerment spirit of the Parent Trigger, and by making it one of three choices parents can make, it would once again free politicians from having to take a position on a potentially controversial issue.

Changing the options could save California taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. Applying the turnaround model to California's 166 lowest-performing schools would cost taxpayers at least \$416 million a year.²⁷ If instead parents with children at those schools were given vouchers

²⁶ We note here that the authors of the California Parent Trigger, Gabe Rose and Ben Austin among them, do not share our recommendation for dropping the turnaround and transformation options and replacing those options with a voucher option. Reasonable people can disagree on such things and yet work together productively on the strategies on which they agree.

²⁷ The America's Recovery and Reinvestment Act set aside funds specifically for the turnaround model. California's share is nearly \$416 million for its 166 qualifying schools. <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/california-receive-nearly-416-million-turn-around-its-persistently-lowest-achieving-schools>

equal to 75 percent of current public school spending, every child who made use of that option would represent a savings of 25 percent. If just 20 percent of the students used vouchers, California taxpayers would save more than \$48.7 million in state education spending,²⁸ a net difference between these two options of \$465 million a year.

5. Making a Better Parent Trigger

California's Parent Trigger was a product of the state's political and economic environment. Parents in Los Angeles and elsewhere were fed up with repeated promises to reform failing schools and wanted immediate action. The state faced the largest state budget deficit in the nation, and the federal government was offering hundreds of millions of dollars to states that agreed to implement its four options for reforming failing schools.

Other states face similar pressures and choices, but they do not have to make the same choices California's lawmakers made. Some changes to the Parent Trigger, suggested by the "flaws and fixes" presented in Part 4, could make it an even more promising reform in other states. In this chapter we describe five ways to make a better Parent Trigger.

Some changes to the Parent Trigger could make it an even more promising reform in other states.

Increase Parent Power

The boldest contribution the Parent Trigger makes to the school reform effort is to place in the hands of parents the power to initiate and oversee fundamental reform. California's Parent Trigger undermines that power by allowing school district officials to overrule a petition by parents. We recommend removing that authority and creating the necessary legal and oversight authorities to compel implementation of what parents call for. In addition:

- The petition process should not be encumbered with petty dictates about paper size and color or unrealistic deadlines. Parents should have access to school premises to collect signatures.
- If school boards are given the authority to overrule a petition by parents, a process for appealing such a decision should be made explicit in the trigger law. Public funding for

²⁸ Figures calculated using Census 2008 per-pupil spending data and National Center for Education Statistics enrollment figures. Average school enrollment = 595 students, per-pupil spending = \$9,863. With 166 failing schools, on average 595 students per school, that's 98,770 students. Assuming 20 percent of students opt for vouchers, that would be 19,754 students leaving public schools. Assuming vouchers worth 75 percent of current per-pupil spending (thus saving 25 percent for each child who uses a voucher), the total savings generated by the voucher program would be 19,754 students x \$2,466 savings = \$48,713,364.

litigation and representation of parents during the appeals process should be considered and provided for in the trigger law. The appeals provision should be written to place the burden of proof on the school district to demonstrate why it cannot implement the reform chosen by parents.

- Boards or committees created to oversee the process should have majority representation by parents, or even consist exclusively of parents since teachers, board members, and others all have manifest conflicts of interest. Candidates for such boards should be ruled ineligible if they work for a school district or have a spouse who works for one.

The point of these suggestions is to put parents on a more level playing field with the powerful interest groups that otherwise dominate the education reform debate.

Expand Eligibility

California's Parent Trigger applies only to failing public schools, narrowly defined, and even then caps the number of eligible schools at 75. Much better would be the following policies:

- The parents of *all* children attending public schools should be able to petition to reform their schools. Even many supposedly successful schools would be improved by converting to charter status, and every school has some number of parents who would rather be able to send their children to a private school. The Parent Trigger should empower them all.
- There should be no arbitrary cap on the number of schools that could participate in the program.
- Resources should be made available to parents so they can make informed choices about whether to begin a petition drive, how to word the petition, how to gather signatures, how to submit the petition, and so on. This could take the form of modest grants given competitively to nonprofit and civic organizations.

Uncouple from Race to the Top

It is not necessary or desirable that other states tie their trigger legislation so closely to the federal program.

Although the federal Race to the Top program provided an impetus for enacting the Parent Trigger in California, it is not necessary or desirable that other states tie their trigger legislation so closely to the federal program.

Federal funds always come with strings and almost always commit states to years of additional unforeseen spending. The federal guidelines may change; to guard against that, the options should be written directly into the parent trigger law. Moreover, school districts can “play

games” with Title 1 money to keep their schools off the federal “program improvement” list; under the California law, schools that don’t appear on that federal list are ineligible for the Parent Trigger.

The way to uncouple the Parent Trigger from Race to the Top is simple: Replace references to the federal legislation with language that reflects the genuine intent of state lawmakers.

Provide Equal Funding for Charter Schools

Parents who select the restart option should not be punished with a loss of public funding for their children. States should adopt policies that ensure charter schools are funded at the same level as public schools, including financial assistance for securing and maintaining facilities.

Expand Options to Include Vouchers

Simply removing the flawed turnaround and transformation models would leave parents with only two choices: closure and charters. We suggest adding a new third option: choice. Give those parents who want them vouchers or scholarships to pay tuition at participating public or private schools. The design of voucher programs can vary greatly to reflect local needs and concerns.²⁹ Voucher programs currently operate in half-a-dozen states and have produced significant improvements in test scores and parental satisfaction.³⁰

Expanding choice with vouchers is somewhat controversial on both the political left and right. Liberals and progressives fear the “commercialization of education” as private businesses launch schools and compete for students. They also worry that middle- and upper-income families will use their vouchers to leave public schools behind for the less affluent. These concerns have been greatly

alleviated by the past decade of experience with for-profit charter school management firms and the high level of participation in voucher programs by minorities and low-income families. The success of voucher programs in Milwaukee and Washington DC ought to remove any liberal doubts as to whether such programs can contribute to social justice.

The success of voucher programs in Milwaukee and Washington DC ought to remove any liberal doubts as to whether such programs can contribute to social justice.

²⁹ Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast, *Education and Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2003), chapter 12; Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).

³⁰ See Walberg, *supra* note 8; Philip Vassallo, “More than grades: How Choice Boosts Parental Involvement and Benefits Children,” *Policy Analysis*, Cato Institute, 2000, <http://www.schoolreform-news.org/article/12066>.

Conservatives and libertarians worry that school choice may undermine local control of public schools or the independence of private schools that currently are ineligible for public funds. Time also has helped make these concerns less relevant and persuasive. Suburbs are much more socio-economically diverse than they were in the past, families relocate more frequently to follow jobs or find desirable amenities, and the much-feared “government takeover” of private schools hasn’t occurred in states with choice programs.

The value of vouchers can be set at a percentage of current per-pupil public school spending, say 75 percent, to reflect the lower operating costs of private schools and the possibility that public schools have fixed costs that cannot be reduced as quickly as enrollment might fall. The program also can be phased in for parents with children already attending private schools.

Conclusion

Adoption of the Parent Trigger in California could be a pivotal moment in the national school reform movement. Because it doesn’t quite fit the ideological agendas or self-interest of the activists and organizations that have played leading roles in past reform efforts, it is not getting the attention it deserves.

Many things have been tried to improve the performance of America’s schools, and few have worked. Experts, politicians, and bureaucrats have dictated what reforms will be tried, and by nearly all accounts they have done a poor job. It’s time to give parents their turn at the wheel.

The Parent Trigger promises to work at many levels. It allows parents to decide if there should be more charter schools, if failing schools should close, and (in our “improved” Parent Trigger model) if some parents should be able to take their share of education tax dollars and use it at a different school. This decentralized approach taps local knowledge and respects local choices. It takes much of the ideological and political baggage out of the school reform effort, removing a major distraction and source of conflict.

We may have been harsh in our criticism of California’s Parent Trigger law, in our search for its flaws and clues for how to make a better law for other states. But California’s program is a major step forward and a bright beacon for other states to see and imitate. We have little doubt that California’s parents, activists, educators, and policymakers will make the Parent Trigger work because they wrote and worked to pass the law, and they have the most at stake in its success.

In the months and years ahead, we hope the Parent Trigger idea spreads from coast to coast, giving millions of parents the opportunity to reform their school or choose a different school. This is a powerful and important idea in an arena that needs good ideas. We stand ready to help as best we can.

Appendix 1

California Education Code, Section 53300-53303

Article 3 - Parent Empowerment

53300. For any school not identified as a persistently lowest-achieving school under Section 53201 which, after one full school year, is subject to corrective action pursuant to paragraph (7) of Section 1116(b) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 et seq.) and continues to fail to make adequate yearly progress, and has an Academic Performance Index score of less than 800, and where at least one-half of the parents or legal guardians of pupils attending the school, or a combination of at least one-half of the parents or legal guardians of pupils attending the school and the elementary or middle schools that normally matriculate into a middle or high school, as applicable, sign a petition requesting the local educational agency to implement one or more of the four interventions identified pursuant to paragraphs (1) to (4), inclusive of subdivision (a) of Section 53202 or the federally mandated alternative governance arrangement pursuant to Section 1116(b)(8)(B)(v) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 et seq.), the local educational agency shall implement the option requested by the parents unless, in a regularly scheduled public hearing, the local educational agency makes a finding in writing stating the reason it cannot implement the specific recommended option and instead designates in writing which of the other options described in this section it will implement in the subsequent school year consistent with requirements specified in federal regulations and guidelines for schools subject to restructuring under Section 1116(b)(8) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 et seq.) and regulations and guidelines for the four interventions.

53301. (a) The local educational agency shall notify the Superintendent and the state board upon receipt of a petition under Section 53300 and upon its final disposition of that petition.

(b) If the local educational agency indicates in writing that it will implement in the upcoming school year a different alternative governance arrangement than requested by the parents, the local educational agency shall notify the Superintendent and the state board that the alternative governance option selected has substantial promise of enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress as defined in the federally mandated state plan under Section 1111(b)(2) of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 et seq.).

53302. (a) No more than 75 schools shall be subject to a petition authorized by this article.

(b) A petition shall be counted toward this limit upon the Superintendent and state board receiving notice from the local educational agency of its final disposition of the petition.

53303. A local educational agency shall not be required to implement the option requested by the parent petition if the request is for reasons other than improving academic achievement or pupil safety.

Appendix 2

Race to the Top Guidelines

Source: Federal Register / Vol. 74, No. 221 / Wednesday, November 18, 2009 / Rules and Regulations, pp. 59828-59830. <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-27426.pdf>

Appendix C. School Intervention Models

There are four school intervention models referred to in Selection Criterion (E)(2): Turnaround model, restart model, school closure, or transformation model. Each is described below.

(a) Turnaround model.

(1) A turnaround model is one in which an LEA must—

(i) Replace the principal and grant the principal sufficient operational flexibility (including in staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach in order to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates;

(ii) Using locally adopted competencies to measure the effectiveness of staff who can work within the turnaround environment to meet the needs of students,

(A) Screen all existing staff and rehire no more than 50 percent; and

(B) Select new staff;

(iii) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in the turnaround school;

(iv) Provide staff with ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development that is aligned with the school's comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure that they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies;

(v) Adopt a new governance structure, which may include, but is not limited to, requiring the school to report to a new "turnaround office" in the LEA or SEA, hire a "turnaround leader" who reports directly to the Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer, or enter into a multi-year contract with the LEA or SEA to obtain added flexibility in exchange for greater accountability;

(vi) Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and "vertically aligned" from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards;

(vii) Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students;

(viii) Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in this notice); and

(ix) Provide appropriate social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students.

(2) A turnaround model may also implement other strategies such as—

- (i) Any of the required and permissible activities under the transformation model; or
- (ii) A new school model (e.g., the med, dual language academy).

(b) Restart model.

A restart model is one in which an LEA converts a school or closes and reopens a school under a charter school operator, a charter management organization (CMO), or an education management organization (EMO) that has been selected through a rigorous review process. (A CMO is a non-profit organization that operates or manages charter schools by centralizing or sharing certain functions and resources among schools. An EMO is a for-profit or non-profit organization that provides ‘whole-school operation’ services to an LEA.) A restart model must enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend the school.

(c) School closure.

School closure occurs when an LEA closes a school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other schools in the LEA that are higher achieving. These other schools should be within reasonable proximity to the closed school and may include, but are not limited to, charter schools or new schools for which achievement data are not yet available.

(d) Transformation model.

A transformation model is one in which an LEA implements each of the following strategies:

(1) Developing and increasing teacher and school leader effectiveness.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must—

(A) Replace the principal who led the school prior to commencement of the transformation model;

(B) Use rigorous, transparent, and equitable evaluation systems for teachers and principals that—

(1) Take into account data on student growth (as defined in this notice) as a significant factor as well as other factors such as multiple observation-based assessments of performance and ongoing collections of professional practice reflective of student achievement and increased high-school graduations rates; and

(2) Are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement;

(C) Identify and reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model, have increased student achievement and high-school graduation rates and identify and remove those who, after ample opportunities have been provided for them to improve their professional practice, have not done so;

(D) Provide staff with ongoing, high-quality, job-embedded professional development (e.g., regarding subject-specific pedagogy, instruction that reflects a deeper understanding of the community served by the school, or differentiated instruction) that is aligned with the school’s comprehensive instructional program and designed with school staff to ensure they are equipped to facilitate effective teaching and learning and have the capacity to successfully implement school reform strategies; and

(E) Implement such strategies as financial incentives, increased opportunities for promotion and career growth, and more flexible work conditions that are designed to recruit, place, and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school.

(ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement other strategies to develop teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness, such as—

(A) Providing additional compensation to attract and retain staff with the skills necessary to meet the needs of the students in a transformation school;

(B) Instituting a system for measuring changes in instructional practices resulting from professional development; or

(C) Ensuring that the school is not required to accept a teacher without the mutual consent of the teacher and principal, regardless of the teacher's seniority.

(2) Comprehensive instructional reform strategies.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must—

(A) Use data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based and “vertically aligned” from one grade to the next as well as aligned with State academic standards; and

(B) Promote the continuous use of student data (such as from formative, interim, and summative assessments) to inform and differentiate instruction in order to meet the academic needs of individual students.

(ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement comprehensive instructional reform strategies, such as—

(A) Conducting periodic reviews to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity, is having the intended impact on student achievement, and is modified if ineffective;

(B) Implementing a school-wide “response-to-intervention” model;

(C) Providing additional supports and professional development to teachers and principals in order to implement effective strategies to support students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and to ensure that limited English proficient students acquire language skills to master academic content;

(D) Using and integrating technology-based supports and interventions as part of the instructional program; and

(E) In secondary schools—

(1) Increasing rigor by offering opportunities for students to enroll in advanced course work (such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate; or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics courses, especially those that incorporate rigorous and relevant project-, inquiry-, or design-based contextual learning opportunities), early-college high schools, dual enrollment programs, or thematic learning academies that prepare students for college and careers, including by providing appropriate supports designed to ensure that low achieving students can take advantage of these programs and course work;

(2) Improving student transition from middle to high school through summer transition programs or freshman academies;

(3) Increasing graduation rates through, for example, credit-recovery programs, re-engagement strategies, smaller learning communities, competency-based instruction and performance-based assessments, and acceleration of basic reading and mathematics skills; or

(4) Establishing early-warning systems to identify students who may be at risk of failing to achieve to high standards or graduate.

(3) Increasing learning time and creating community-oriented schools.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must—

(A) Establish schedules and implement strategies that provide increased learning time (as defined in this notice); and

(B) Provide ongoing mechanisms for family and community engagement.

(ii) Permissible activities. An LEA may also implement other strategies that extend learning time and create community-oriented schools, such as—

(A) Partnering with parents and parent organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, health clinics, other State or local agencies, and others to create safe school environments that meet students' social, emotional, and health needs;

(B) Extending or restructuring the school day so as to add time for such strategies as advisory periods that build relationships between students, faculty, and other school staff;

(C) Implementing approaches to improve school climate and discipline, such as implementing a system of positive behavioral supports or taking steps to eliminate bullying and student harassment; or

(D) Expanding the school program to offer full-day kindergarten or prekindergarten.

(4) Providing operational flexibility and sustained support.

(i) Required activities. The LEA must—

(A) Give the school sufficient operational flexibility (such as staffing, calendars/time, and budgeting) to implement fully a comprehensive approach to substantially improve student achievement outcomes and increase high school graduation rates; and

(B) Ensure that the school receives ongoing, intensive technical assistance and related support from the LEA, the SEA, or a designated external lead partner organization (such as a school turnaround organization or an EMO).

(ii) Permissible activities. The LEA may also implement other strategies for providing operational flexibility and intensive support, such as—

(A) Allowing the school to be run under a new governance arrangement, such as a turnaround division within the LEA or SEA; or

(B) Implementing a per-pupil schoolbased budget formula that is weighted based on student needs. If a school identified as a persistently lowest-achieving school has implemented, in whole or in part within the last two years, an intervention that meets the requirements of the turnaround, restart, or transformation models, the school may continue or complete the intervention being implemented.

About the Authors

Joseph Bast is president of The Heartland Institute and coauthor or editor of 14 books, including *Rebuilding America's Schools* (1990), *Why We Spend Too Much on Health Care* (1992), *Eco-Sanity: A Common-Sense Guide to Environmentalism* (1994), *Education & Capitalism* (2003), and *Climate Change Reconsidered* (2009). His writing has appeared in *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Economics of Education Review*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *The Cato Journal*, *USA Today*, and many of the country's largest-circulation newspapers. He is publisher of *School Reform News*.

Ben Boychuk is managing editor of The Heartland Institute's *School Reform News*, writes a weekly syndicated column for Scripps-Howard News Service, and contributes regularly to the *Sacramento Bee*. He previously was an editorial writer for *Investor's Business Daily* and the *Press-Enterprise* in Riverside, California. He was co-moderator of RedBlueAmerica.com and was managing editor of the *Claremont Review of Books* from 2000 until 2004.

Bruno Behrend, J.D. is director of the Center for School Reform at The Heartland Institute. He is coauthor of *Illinois Deserves Better - The Ironclad Case for an Illinois Constitutional Convention*, which coincided with a campaign to pass a referendum calling for a Constitutional Convention. He has served as an advisor to various groups seeking to rewrite the legislative article of the Illinois Constitution, as policy director for a gubernatorial candidate in Illinois, and as a radio show host. He earned his J.D. from IIT-Kent College of Law in 1990.

Marc Oestreich is legislative specialist on education and telecommunications at The Heartland Institute, where his responsibilities include interacting with elected officials and staff on these issues, tracking new legislation, and drafting responses to emerging issues. Prior to joining Heartland he was a graduate student at Purdue University studying political psychology and education policy and worked for several Web site design and marketing firms in Indiana.

About The Heartland Institute

The Heartland Institute is a national nonprofit organization based in Chicago. Founded in 1984, it began as a state-based free-market think tank but soon evolved into a regional and, since 1993, a national organization.

Heartland now has policy advisors and supporters in all 50 states. Approximately 120 academics and professional economists participate in its peer review process, and more than 150 elected officials serve on its Legislative Forum. Heartland currently has a full-time staff of 35 and a 2010 budget of \$7 million.

The Heartland Institute contacts more elected officials, more often, than any other free-market think tank in the United States. According to a telephone survey of randomly selected state and local officials conducted in 2009, 85 percent of state legislators and 63 percent of local officials say they read and rely on Heartland publications.

Some 120,000 of the nation's most influential people – including every state and national elected official – receive at least one Heartland publication every month. Heartland also operates PolicyBot, an online clearinghouse for the work of some 350 think tanks and advocacy groups.

Heartland's full-time staff of government relations professionals interacts daily with hundreds of elected officials across the country, and its public relations and media specialists help shape public opinion by writing and placing dozens of letters to the editor and opinion editorials each week.

For more information, visit our Web sites at www.heartland.org and www.schoolreform-news.org; call 312/377-4000; or write to The Heartland Institute, 19 South LaSalle Street, Suite 903, Chicago, Illinois 60603.



© 2010 The Heartland Institute. Distributed by **The Heartland Institute**, a nonprofit and nonpartisan public policy research organization. Nothing in this report should be construed as reflecting the views of The Heartland Institute, nor as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of legislation. Additional copies of this Policy Brief are available for \$5.95 from The Heartland Institute, 19 South LaSalle Street #903, Chicago, IL 60603; phone 312/377-4000; fax 312/377-5000; email think@heartland.org; Web <http://www.heartland.org>.