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**How Paradigms Create Politics:
The Transformation of American Educational Policy, 1980-2001**

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ABSTRACT:

American educational policy was rapidly transformed between 1980 and 2001. Accountability was introduced into a sphere that had long been loosely coupled, both major political parties reevaluated longstanding positions, and significant institutional control over the schooling shifted to the federal government for the first time in the nation's history. These changes cannot be explained by conventional theories such as interest groups, rational choice, and historical institutionalism. Drawing on extensive archival research and more than 80 interviews, this article argues that this transformation can be explained by a changed policy paradigm which restructured the political landscape around education reform. More generally, while previous scholars have observed that "policies create politics," it should also be recognized that "paradigms create politics."

Keywords: A Nation at Risk, accountability, assessment, No Child Left Behind, paradigm, politics, school reform

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INTRODUCTION

Over the course of only one generation, American educational policy has been substantially transformed into the system we have today. As recently as 1980, states and local districts were primarily in charge of schooling; a Republican president was calling for the abolition of the Department of Education; and the most influential scholarly lens for understanding schools depicted them as “loosely coupled systems” in which myth and ceremony mattered more than academic outputs (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Today, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the federal government has assumed a greater degree of control over schooling than at any previous point in the nation’s history. A Republican president led the charge for this expanded federal role, and demands for accountability for results are so ubiquitous that even one of the leading theorists of loosely coupled systems has argued that that framework no longer applies (Rowan, 2006).

What explains this transformation? Traditional approaches which privilege interest groups, rational choice calculations, or path dependent processes are unable to explain key features of these changes. The most powerful interest groups in the domain, teachers unions, have frequently been opposed to the movement towards accountability.¹ Rational choice explanations can explain why politicians emphasize testing and accountability in a context in which the public favors them, but they cannot explain how or why that context shifted between 1980 and 2001. Path dependent explanations can explain the persistence of long-standing norms against federal involvement in schooling, but are particularly unsuited to explaining why there recently has been such a significant departure from this well-worn path.

This article suggests that the impetus for the transformation was the creation of a powerful educational paradigm, which crystallized in the famous *A Nation at Risk* report. This paradigm, which emerged in the early 1980s and is still dominant today, holds that educational success is central to national, state, and individual economic success; that American schools across the board are substantially underperforming and in need of reform; that schools rather than social forces should be held responsible for academic outcomes; and that success should be measured by externally verifiable tests. This paradigm has directed the school reform movement over the last 25 years, producing a variety of policy efforts that are consistent with its tenets, including charter schools, public school choice, vouchers, and the subject of this article, the growth of state and federal efforts to impose standards and introduce accountability. These assumptions not only have redirected the policy goals around schooling; they have restructured the politics of education. Specifically, under the reign of the *A Nation at Risk* paradigm, more powerful political actors have entered the domain; interest groups have shifted to embrace the new paradigm; critics out of step with the paradigm have been rhetorically marginalized; and the venue in which education policy is discussed has shifted upwards, as the new* paradigm has legitimized the claims of federal and state government to assert increasing control over what had previously been the province of local districts.

A Nation at Risk has not been ignored in previous accounts of American educational history; it is often cited as a critical document in American school reform (Boyd & Kerchner, 1987; Graham & Gordon, 2003; Guthrie & Springer, 2004; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009;

* The paradigm was “new” in the sense that it crystallized a master narrative that was different from what had come immediately before. At the same time, as I have argued elsewhere, the way in which the educational problem was defined here is quite similar to the way it has been defined at other times in our nation’s history (see Mehta, 2013a, 2013b). It is also the case that the most recent paradigm resonated in part because it built upon strands that had been developing in the period that preceded it, but gained its impact by bringing these strands together in a particularly forceful way. I discuss this point in more detail below.

McDermott, 2011). This article seeks to build on and extend this literature by drawing on new state-level evidence to explore exactly why *A Nation Risk* resonated so powerfully with such diverse constituencies and how *A Nation at Risk* reshaped state politics. I also look deeper into the past, finding a more diverse set of antecedents than is usually identified, and further into the future, seeking to specify more precisely how *A Nation at Risk* affected subsequent reform efforts.

The article also makes a theoretical contribution by showing the mechanisms through which paradigms can shape politics. In its emphasis on paradigms, this article joins a growing literature that emphasizes the role that ideational factors play in affecting political outcomes (Steensland, 2006; Somers & Block, 2005; Berman, 2001; Blyth, 2002; Beland & Cox, 2010; see Mehta, 2010 for a review). This piece builds upon this growing literature to illustrate the ways in which a powerful paradigm can restructure the political landscape. Paradigms can shift the direction and boundaries of debate, which actors are involved, and ultimately can provide the impetus for institutional transformation. In so doing, ideas provide an important complement to more traditional interest group, rational choice, or institutional explanations. Implications for understanding the role of paradigms in social and political life are discussed in conclusion.

CHANGES TO EXPLAIN

No Child Left Behind is the culmination of nearly two decades of changes that have transformed American education. Changes are evident in *policy*, in *institutional responsibility* and in *politics*. At the policy level, an array of reforms has proliferated at the state level since the 1980s, including charter schools, public school choice, vouchers, and standards-based reform. All of these reforms have challenged traditional public schools. The most ubiquitous of these reforms, and the one that became the template for federal policy, is standards-based reform.

Standards-based reform brought together three elements that its proponents hoped would create systemic change: setting standards for what students should be expected to do; establishing assessments to measure progress; and holding schools accountable for progress towards these goals. Standards-based reform spread through the states beginning in the early 1990s, was encouraged by the federal passage of Goals 2000 and the Improving America's Schools Act in 1994, and became a federal requirement under No Child Left Behind.² Given the pluralism that has traditionally characterized American schooling—*10,000 Democracies*, as one prominent book about local districts labeled it—this movement marks a considerable shift towards a particular policy vision of school reform.

Not only has a particular vision of schooling become dominant; there is increasing evidence that the policy emphasis on accountability is penetrating the technical core of actual school practice, a significant departure from many previous policy efforts. Historically, educational policy has been seen as pendulum-swinging cycles of policy reform that have done little to alter the underlying grammar of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This view is consistent with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) famous description of schools as "loosely coupled systems" that conform to public will in their outward appearance but not their internal practice. Recent work on the implementation of test-based accountability suggests that loosely coupled systems are giving way to more tightly coupled ones, as the attaching of significant stakes to testing has caused schools and teachers to direct their efforts towards improving student performance on those tests (Fuhrman, 1999, 2001). While a significant debate rages about whether these changes have been good (Peterson & West, 2003), bad (Meier, 2002) or mixed (Elmore, 2004), what matters for these purposes is that they clearly have been consequential in

how the school system functions, so much so that even Rowan (2006) now argues that loosely coupled school systems are a thing of the past.

These changes have also marked a considerable shift in who has institutional control over schooling. Since the nation's inception, schooling in America has been controlled by local school districts, with states playing an important but secondary role. The initial break with state and local control came with the creation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, which established the precedent of federal involvement and schooling and created an ongoing federal funding stream for education. However, these funds were directed primarily to high poverty schools, did not ask for accountability for results, and left almost all decisions about the governance of schools to localities and states. What is notable about the recent changes encapsulated in No Child Left Behind is the way in which the federal government has significantly extended its reach: while still footing less than 10 percent of the bill, it has now extended its reach from high poverty schools to all public schools, specifying the grades in which students need to be tested, the pace at which schools need to improve, and the series of escalating consequences if schools do not improve. While schooling remains a function shared across levels of government, the federal government has greatly increased its role in shaping the day to day life of all public schools (Peterson & West, 2003; McGuinn, 2006).

Finally, these changes have been possible only because of considerable political shifts in the positions of the major parties on educational issues. Democrats retreated from their longstanding position that the role of the party was to provide greater funding for high poverty students to a vision of school reform that emphasizes accountability as much as spending. The shift was even greater for Republicans, who moved from President Ronald Reagan's pledge to abolish the Department of Education in 1980 to the greatest expansion of the federal role in the

nation's history when President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act. This article seeks to explain these policy, institutional, and political changes.

PUZZLES NOT FULLY EXPLAINED BY OTHER APPROACHES

These developments pose a number of problems for the leading theories in political sociology. While the debate between competing approaches on education policy is not as fully developed as the debate about the welfare state, the leading explanations for these changes can be grouped under three headings: interest groups, rational choice, and historical institutionalism.

Interest group explanations emphasize the role that business groups have played in demanding standards and accountability (Murphy, 1990; Odden & Marsh, 1990; Goldberg & Traiman, 2001). Previously a non-factor in educational politics, business groups are said to have provided powerful voices supporting standards and accountability at both the state and federal levels (Ginsberg & Wimpelberg, 1987; Goldberg & Traiman, 2001). There are two problems with this view. First, a business-centered approach does not explain why business groups, which historically have been opposed to school finance reforms in an effort to keep their taxes down (Mazzoni 1995), have come in recent years to see their interests as lying with school reform. Explaining this change is critical to understanding their role in this transformation. Second, a business-driven view of the changes fails to explain why business was able to impose its will in an increasingly crowded interest group landscape. Detailed studies of education politics have suggested that since 1980 the number of groups involved in educational reform has multiplied, with business being only one group among many that have sought to make a greater claim over education (Mawhinney & Lugg, 2001; Mazzoni, 1995). The most important of these groups are the teachers unions: one study suggested that in 43 of 50 states they were the most powerful actors in educational politics (Thomas & Herbenar, 1991). The larger of these unions, the

National Education Association (NEA), has consistently opposed efforts to introduce educational accountability. Yet despite its considerable financial resources and political power, it failed to block movements for accountability.³ Any interest group explanation has to explain why accountability triumphed (even among Democrats) despite objections from the strongest interest groups in school politics.

A second explanation draws on the rational choice tradition, particularly the median voter theorem. McGuinn (2006) has done some of the most detailed reconstruction of the federal politics of this transformation, and, while he is not a rational choice theorist himself, a number of his observations are consistent with the idea that strategic imperatives have led both parties to increasingly emphasize education reform. As education rose on the agenda in recent years, first state and later federal politicians acted strategically to offer plans for education reform in order to win voters to their cause. There is considerable merit to this strategic rational choice view. It explains why both parties have pursued the education issue, why Democrats were willing to buck the NEA, and why Republicans were willing to sacrifice longstanding principles against federal control in favor of short-term electoral advantage. But it is also limited in that it assumes much of what needs to be explained, offering no account of how the context was created within which these choices became rational.⁴ Key aspects of the context that need to be explained include: Why is education now a high salience issue for states and the federal government when that was not the case in the past? What has primed the public to see the problem in terms that make standards and accountability the logical solution? Overall, while rational choice approaches can be important in explaining the strategic behavior of political actors in pursuing education reform, they do not explain how the context was created within which these strategic actions were carried out.

If rational choice is overly focused on a short time horizon, historical institutionalism is often the preferred approach for those whose questions are focused on change over longer periods (Thelen & Steinmo, 1992; Orren and Skowronek, 2004). But while historical institutionalism can explain the baseline from which the recent changes depart—decentralized federalism that had long inhibited national action on schools—its longstanding emphasis on path dependence would seem to foreclose the institutional changes that are so remarkable about the case under study. In partial answer to this objection, an important book by Manna (2006) has argued that while historical institutionalism has traditionally focused on how America’s system of federalism impedes major policy development, in this case having multiple venues provided opportunities for “borrowing,” with state and federal developments feeding off one another. Of course, this begs a further question: Given that American education had embraced local control of schooling since its inception and that the arrangements of federalism had always permitted borrowing between levels of government, what prompted increased state and federal involvement over the past 20 years? As is often true of historical institutionalist approaches, the mechanism for change is not specified (Clemens & Cook, 1999).

Finally, any theory of these changes that gives causal primacy to any single set of actors is likely to fall short, since the existing literature on standards-based reform suggests that many different actors were responsible for initiating the policy. Standards-based reform was driven by business groups in Texas, a court decision in Kentucky, state legislators in Utah, the governor’s office in Michigan, and a state superintendent of schools in Maryland, to name just five.⁵ Any workable theory would need to explain how different actors came to advocate similar policies.

To briefly summarize the puzzles unexplained by these approaches:

1. Why did the agenda status of education rise, encouraging “rational” politicians to make it a central issue?

2. Why did both parties come to support the reforms, despite the longstanding historical differences on education between the parties?
3. What explains why different actors—courts, legislators, governors, state bureaucrats, business groups—each initiated similar reforms?
4. Why did standards and accountability triumph despite the opposition of the strongest interest group in the field?
5. Given predictions of institutional “lock-in” and “path dependence,” why was there such a significant shift away from the institutional patterns that had characterized American schooling since its inception?

THE POWER OF IDEAS: HOW PARADIGMS CREATE POLITICS

Recognizing the limitations of these approaches, a quickly growing literature on “ideas and politics” has sprung up over the past 15 years (Beland & Cox, 2010; Mehta, 2010; Berman, 1998; Hall, 1993; Campbell, 2002; Beland, 2005; Steensland 2006). Using a variety of different frameworks and language, scholars have invoked paradigms (Kuhn, 1962; Hall, 1993), roadmaps or worldviews (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993), or simply ideas (Berman, 1998) as ways to explain actors’ commitments to their chosen ends. In areas as diverse as human rights policy (Sikkink, 1993), airline and trucking deregulation (Derthick & Quirk, 1985), industrial policy (Dobbin, 1994) and the welfare state (Berman, 1998), research suggests that ideas provide important templates that guide policy action. Responding to earlier materialist contentions that ideas are largely epiphenomenal, much of this work has sought to contrast interest-based and ideational approaches, showing that ideas were important in creating policy even when interest groups were arrayed against their triumph (Derthick & Quirk, 1985). This work has had considerable impact in the field, and even those who were at one time skeptical about the causal role of ideas have begun to incorporate them into their work.⁶

If ideationally inclined scholars have succeeded in creating a place at a table previously dominated by Marxist, pluralist, state-centered, and rational choice approaches, they have only

just begun to build a more sophisticated set of conceptual tools that would specify *how* ideas matter and how they interact with other forces (such as interests, institutions, and policy entrepreneurs) to affect policy selection and change. In recent years, a few ideationally oriented scholars have started to specify pathways through which ideas affect politics, but they remain few and far between (Blyth, 2002; Lieberman, 2002; Steensland, 2006).

In this work, I explore the salience of one particular kind of idea: a “problem definition” or “policy paradigm.” A problem definition is a particular way of understanding a complex reality. For example, homelessness can be seen as the product of a housing shortage, high unemployment, or a lack of individual gumption. Problem definitions resist efforts to separate the normative and the empirical, as they generally evoke both normative and empirical descriptions in ways that are mutually reinforcing.⁷ The way a problem is framed has significant implications for the types of policy solutions that will seem desirable, and hence much of political argument is fought at the level of problem definition. During the conflict stage, “problem definition” is the appropriate term; when one has triumphed and assumes the status of a master narrative, it can be called a “policy paradigm,” following Kuhn’s view of paradigms as dominant views that preclude significant dissent.

Here I will focus on paradigms at a middle level of generality—that of defining a problem within an issue area, in this case education. There are also shifts in the climate of ideas at the broader level of public philosophies—such as whether the government is seen as the solution or the problem—which are both informed by and shape the way more specific issues are regarded (Mehta, 2010). While I focus primarily on the story of how the educational problem definition was reshaped, I also discuss in passing the broader shifts in public dialogue around government and social policy as they are relevant for fully understanding the story.

In particular, this article uses the educational case to investigate one strand of how ideas matter; more specifically, how paradigms can create politics.⁸ While some of the most cited writing about paradigms has focused on how they shape and reshape the *cognitive* maps held by key policymakers (Hall, 1993; Weir, 1992; Legro, 2000), less attention has been devoted to how paradigms can reshape the *political* environment around an issue (see also Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Once a changed definition of a problem comes to the fore, I will argue, it has the potential to reshape virtually every aspect of the politics governing the issue.

One impact of a new problem definition is that it *changes the nature of the debate*. A dominant problem definition serves to bound the potential possibilities of what can be advocated, giving it a powerful agenda-setting function. Policy entrepreneurs who offer solutions that are consistent with the broader agenda are elevated while those whose solutions do not fit the dominant problem definition are marginalized. The dominant problem definition also affects who has standing to speak: If the problem is that schools are not as efficient as for-profits, business leaders become emboldened; if the problem is unleashing students' creativity, then artists and teachers are empowered. Problem definitions not only provide a template for their proponents; they also can constrain the positions that their opponents can take.

Another effect of a new problem definition is that it *changes the constellation of actors*. When new problem definitions come to the fore, new actors become involved and new cleavages are created.⁹ New problem definitions can motivate the formation of new groups, which in turn can have a significant effect on subsequent debate. Precisely because these new groups accept the dominant conception of the problem, they are welcomed by the broader political environment and can play a critical role in shaping policy alternatives. New problem definitions can also

create opportunities for policy entrepreneurs and experts since existing groups seek guidance on how to position themselves in a new environment.

A new problem definition can also *create an opportunity for major institutional change*. Which actors are motivated and legitimated to act in an area is dependent in part upon how the area is defined. As we will see, when education became more heavily defined as an economic issue, state and federal actors who had previously seen education as largely a local function were motivated and enabled to act because the issue was now seen as falling within their jurisdiction. While institutional theories tend to emphasize stability, idea-oriented theories can provide an account of major shifts in institutional responsibility.

In sum, once crystallized, a new paradigm not only delimits policy options to conform to that paradigm (Hall, 1993; Weir, 1992), but it can restructure the political landscape around an issue, change the agenda status of the issue, the players involved, their standing to speak, and the venue in which the issue is debated. In recent years, scholars in American political development (Pierson, 1993; Campbell, 2003) have seized on Schattschneider's (1935) observation that "policies create politics." Scholars of paradigm changes should recognize that "paradigms create politics" as well.¹⁰

Such a view complements the other explanations above in ways that allows for a fuller explanation of these changes. Interests still matter, but paradigms can help us understand why actors come to assume the positions that they did. Rational calculations are still useful for understanding why politicians take the positions they do in the short run, but paradigms help to explain how the context was created in which those positions came to seem rational. Historical institutional explanations help us understand the potency of norms against federal action, while ideas can help us understand how and why federal actors were able to expand their purview.

DATA AND METHODS

There have been three critical events in the transformation of schooling since 1980. The first was the publication of the blockbuster 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, a catalytic document that crystallized a new paradigm that would spark an avalanche of efforts to reform American schools. The second was the states' adoption of standards-based reform in the 1990s. The third was the federal move towards standards-based reform, which built upon the state reforms and culminated in No Child Left Behind. Each of these events is examined using careful process tracing (Mahoney, 1999), drawing on documentary and interview evidence that allows for a detailed reconstruction of who advocated what and for what reason. Taken at any given moment in time, process tracing allows us to see which actors, interests, institutions, and ideas were important in producing a paradigm or a policy outcome. Taken over two decades, it permits an analysis of how actors' positions changed over time, a perspective which is critical for an examination that seeks to understand not only who pushed for what but how they came to know what to push for.

While there has been previous work on the changing *federal* politics of education (Manna, 2006; McGuinn, 2006; DeBray, 2006; Kosar, 2005; Cross 2004), there has been far less that has sought to integrate empirical research on *states* into a broader account of the national movement towards standards-based reform. This is a considerable gap in the literature, given that most scholars agree that longstanding norms against federal involvement in schools meant that the recent federal changes could have happened only by building on an already existing state movement (Manna, 2006). Particularly important to the overall account is understanding why states converged around standards-based reform in the 1990s, before they were required to adopt it under No Child Left Behind in 2001.¹¹

To understand this convergence, this study considers three states—Michigan, Maryland and Utah—and tracks their respective paths to standards-based reform. I chose these states for two reasons. First, since I was trying to understand how so many states came to adopt the same policy, I wanted to choose states that were very different on a number of dimensions that would presumably affect their education policy choices. These three states differ on the following dimensions: region, partisanship, timing of adoption of standards-based reform, minority population, initial test scores, level of local control, political culture, and per pupil spending (see Appendix Table 1). Second, there has been a lot of work done on a few well-known standard leading states, particularly Kentucky, Texas, North Carolina, and California. But if the goal is to understand how 49 states came to adopt standards-based reform before No Child Left Behind, understanding the politics of lower profile states is also important. Maryland was an early adopter of standards, thus I have one from the lead states, but also two that came later to standards. In addition, by researching less well-known states, what I learn about them can be pooled with others' research on the more well-known states to create a fuller understanding of the standards movement.¹²

The data for this work come from a wide range of sources. Interviews with key participants, examination of primary documents and use of archival materials allowed for reconstruction of the course of events. Eighty interviews were conducted with informants involved with state and federal reforms. Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to three hours, with an average of one hour. Almost all were conducted in person: the author spent three to eight weeks in each of the states and in Washington, D.C. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Interviewees included state legislators, a former governor (John Engler of Michigan), federal legislative aides, policy experts, journalists, interest group representatives,

and federal and state department of education officials. Some of these interviewees also permitted access to their personal or organizational files, sources that provide a more complete record of what they were thinking at the time of key decisions. Several thousand pages of documents were culled from state libraries and archives in Maryland, Utah, and Michigan, as well as from the Library of Congress. These primary materials were supplemented with an examination of local newspapers, published and unpublished dissertations, state and federal legislative records, and a variety of secondary sources. This range of material allows triangulation (Yin 1994, Roth and Mehta 2002) to compensate for the weaknesses of individual data sources. In general, this study uses the interviews to inform the overall argument, but relies more on documents (and newspaper accounts) than interviews to reconstruct past events because they provide a more detailed account of what happened when and why.

THE EMERGENCE OF A POWERFUL PARADIGM: A *NATION AT RISK*

There was no obvious indication in 1982 that the next two decades would witness an explosion of reform strategies aiming to increase performance in schooling. An economic recession, severe state budget deficits, and Reagan's stated intention to downgrade the federal role in education policy all pointed to education remaining a low priority item. In their 1982 textbook on the politics of education, longtime education policy analysts Michael Kirst and Frederick Wirt pointed to tax revolts, slow national economic growth, the shrinking share of the population with students in the schools, and the decreasing federal role as factors that likely precluded significant education reform, concluding that "the 1980s will be a decade of consolidating and digesting the large number of innovations from the 1970s."¹³

This prediction proved incorrect, because of the release of the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983. *A Nation at Risk* was the product of a commission created by Reagan Secretary of

Education Terrel Bell, whose primary assignment from Ronald Reagan was to find a way to eliminate his own department. He devised the idea of a national commission to report on the quality of American education and make suggestions for improvement as a way of increasing national attention to the important functions of public education. Finding little support from Reagan's office for the appointment of a Presidential commission amid criticisms that it might generate a greater federal role for education, in July of 1981 Bell appointed a commission himself.¹⁴ The committee was chaired by University of Utah President David P. Gardner, and was comprised of seven university faculty and administrators, seven state and local school personnel, including principals, teachers, school board members and superintendents (seven members), one business leader, one politician, and two others.¹⁵ It included some very distinguished educators, including Gardner, Chemistry Nobel Prize winner Glenn Seaborg, Harvard physics professor Gerald Holton, and Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti. The group engaged in 18 months of fact-finding, commissioning dozens of papers and holding six public meetings as well as a number of regional meetings with a variety of stakeholders, before producing its analysis.

In a short report that employed bold and ominous language, the report assailed the nation's poor educational performance, famously declaring that the United States was caught in a "rising tide of mediocrity" that imperiled the nation's economic future. In support of its case, it cited a variety of academic indicators, most notably high levels of illiteracy, poor performance on international comparisons, and a steady decline in SAT scores from 1963 to 1980. Quoting analyst Paul Copperman, the report claimed that this would be the first time in the history of the country that the educational skills of one generation would not be equal to those of their parents. Contrasting this declining educational picture with the centrality of skills and human capital in

the knowledge-based post-industrial economy, the report linked the future of the nation's international economic competitiveness to the reform of its educational system. The report's recommendations called for a new focus on "excellence" for all, which would be achieved through a revamped high school curriculum with fewer electives and more required courses in math, English, science and social studies, a combination that the authors called "the New Basics." It also called for a longer school day and school year, more homework, tighter university admission standards, and more testing for students as indicators of proficiency. For teachers, it recommended higher standards for entry into the profession, an 11-month professional year, and market-sensitive and performance-based teacher pay.

The reaction to the report was instantaneous and overwhelming. The report was released in a Rose Garden Ceremony in which Reagan, disregarding the report's findings, used it as an occasion to highlight his familiar agenda of school prayer, tuition tax credits and the end of the "federal intrusion" into education. But the media reports of the Rose Garden ceremony highlighted the claims about the "rising tide of mediocrity," pushing Reagan's agenda to the background.¹⁶ The U.S. Government Printing Office received more than 400 requests for copies in a single hour the following day and distributed more than six million copies over the course of the next year. The press interest was insatiable: *The Washington Post* published almost two articles per week on *A Nation at Risk* in the year following the report's release.¹⁷ An assessment in 1984 found that more than 250 state task forces had been put together to study education and recommend changes.¹⁸ As we will see in the discussions of the subsequent state and federal changes below, this impact proved enduring over many years to come.

The reasons why the report hit such a chord are multi-faceted and have been discussed in more detail by the author elsewhere (Mehta 2013a). Since the focus of this article is on the

consequences of paradigm changes and not its causes, here I just briefly note that the following factors were important in the report capturing such widespread attention: 1) the brevity of the report and its hyperbolic language; 2) the citing of alarming indicators, particularly the SAT decline; 3) the news hook created by the conflict between Reagan's initial comments and the report's findings; 4) the high status and legitimacy of the authors; 5) the timing of the report, as it fell in the midst of an economic recession, and seemed to explain in part why the U.S. was being outpaced by international competitors; 6) the linking of the educational to the economic, which greatly widened the interest in the report; and, as I will discuss in more detail in the next section, 7) the way in which the report's narrative resonated (Binder 1993) with a variety of political, economic and educational developments.

Crystallizing a Powerful Paradigm: The Problem Definition of *A Nation at Risk*

As we will see in the pages that follow, the paradigm framed in *A Nation at Risk* launched a national school reform movement. But this paradigm was not created out of whole cloth—its framing of the problem brought together a number of strands which had been developing during the 1970s and early 1980s. By crystallizing these various strands into a short catalytic document, it was able to frame an agenda for the future by knitting together a number of streams from the past. By building on these existing streams, the report ensured that it would have a significant initial constituency; by powerfully and evocatively framing an agenda, it built a new and much larger group of stakeholders who would carry forward its analysis.

[Table 1 About Here]

Four strands in particular were important (see Table 1). The first and most important was the economic shift towards a post-industrial knowledge-based economy. *A Nation at Risk* defined the purpose of schooling primarily in economic terms, as part of a battle for international

competitiveness. This analysis resonated because it was becoming widely apparent that the economy was shifting to reward skills, a change which meant that schooling would be increasingly important for international, state, and individual success. The idea that schooling was a key to individual mobility was not new (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004), nor was the idea of human capital (Schultz, 1963); what was freshly resonant was the notion that national (and state) economic success was becoming increasingly dependent upon the available stock of this human capital. State governors, particularly in the South, had already begun to see that improving human capital was becoming increasingly central to their economic standing (SREB, 1981; Toch, 1991), a position which was increasingly taken up by governors across the country after *A Nation at Risk*. The widespread acceptance of the centrality of the link between educational production and economic growth, at both national and state levels, was the single most important factor in launching the subsequent reform movement.

Second, *A Nation at Risk* marked the crystallization of a different set of goals for schooling, which shifted from moderately improving the lowest performing students to increasing performance across the board under the banner of higher standards for all. High standards for all drew its power through a kind of symbolic boundary drawing (Lamont & Molnar, 2002), counter-posing itself to a variety of trends it took to be inauspicious. At the policy level, it represented a reaction against “back to basics” that seemed not ambitious enough to match the scale of the problem; at the social and political level, it reacted against what many (particularly on the right) perceived as an overemphasis on equity stemming from the 1960s; at the pedagogical level, it reacted against “child-centered” pedagogical views that had gained prominence in the 1960s in favor of a more traditional view of schooling as teaching material that needed to be mastered.

Third, *A Nation at Risk* placed the responsibility for addressing the problem of poor school performance on the schools, crystallizing a retreat from a broader social responsibility for education that had been on the rise since the 1960s.¹⁹ The political ill will engendered by desegregation through busing left politicians fearful of educational reforms that would require broader societal commitment (Rieder, 1985), particularly in a period of growing skepticism of government and a shift towards a more conservative political economy (McGuinn, 2009; Wells, 2009). At the same time, research on “effective schools” (Edmonds, 1979) seemed to suggest that schools could make significant differences in outcomes even for high-poverty students, providing a boost to the idea that school characteristics, including higher expectations, could be the first step toward change.

Fourth, *A Nation at Risk* accelerated a shift in the site of accountability for schooling. Schools had long been primarily accountable to local school boards for whatever those boards felt was important; *A Nation at Risk* increased the emphasis on schools being held accountable by the state on standardized tests. Part of this shift was directly attributable to *A Nation at Risk*'s analysis: since the problem was underperformance on international tests, success would be measured by higher performance on quantitative tests. But the need for external markers was also related to a growing distrust of educators' expertise. Rising rates of unionization among teachers in the 1960s and 1970s undermined their claims to be guardians of the public good and increased legislator skepticism about their claims of professional expertise (Toch, 1991). The rise and spread of minimum competency tests in the 1970s presaged the standards and accountability movement to come, as it reflected the growing skepticism among legislators about the failings of schools and the need for measurable accountability (Guthrie, 1981). Finally, fiscal issues contributed to the growing demand for external accountability. The share of total education

spending by the states as opposed to localities had increased to the point where states were now contributing the plurality of the total funds. The combination of greater state spending and the economic pressures and tax revolts of the 1970s meant that state legislators were becoming increasingly likely to demand accountability for their limited state resources.

A Nation at Risk integrated these four strands into a short and catalytic document. As we will see, by linking the educational to the economic and shifting the problem from poor students to all students, the document called into existence a broad public backing for school reform. But the analysis was built on more than just the economic rationale. The commission took a variety of existing developments—the shift to the post-industrial economy, the rise of international economic competitors, the cultural backlash against the permissiveness of the 1960s, the political backlash against the Great Society and busing, the decline in test scores, the rising distrust of educators—and integrated them into one master narrative that seized the nation’s attention and would set the terms of subsequent debate.

THE IMPACT OF PARADIGM CHANGE IN THE STATES: CHANGING GOALS, RESTRUCTURING POLITICS, TRANSFORMING POLICY

The paradigm change described above sparked a series of changes in educational policy and politics and eventually in the institutional responsibility for schooling. These changes spread across the states first, a development which then enabled federal reform.

CHANGING GOALS OF EDUCATION: FROM THE EXISTENTIAL TO THE ECONOMIC

The impact of the paradigm described in *A Nation at Risk* was apparent throughout the states. Research on the national impact of *A Nation at Risk* revealed that forty-five states initiated or increased graduation requirements for course taking, and two-thirds of states increased teacher testing.²⁰ But more than specific initiatives, the *A Nation at Risk* paradigm framed the very ends

that schooling was seeking to accomplish. As evidence on this point, consider the discussion of education in governors' State of the State addresses in the three case study states. In each of the states, the discussion of education after 1983 reflects the new paradigm's emphasis on education as part of a broader strategy for human capital.

The shift was most apparent in Michigan. In the pre-1983 addresses, education is largely characterized as an end that is important in itself rather than as a means to a broader goal of economic development. The 1982 State of the State address, for example, has sections on school finance, educational assessment, compensatory education, and special and bilingual education, but it has no mention of the economic purpose of education. Instead, the 1982 address lists as primary educational objectives for the state: ensuring equal opportunity; distributing the tax burden equitably; and devising systems of testing that ensure the effectiveness of educational programs.²¹ The 1984 State of the State address, by contrast, begins to talk of education in human capital terms, opining that if state support for education continues to decline, "this disinvestment in the future, if left unchecked, would undermine our efforts to spur economic development, create jobs and improve our quality of life."²² Subsequent addresses would reaffirm this theme, with economic and educational sections of the addresses merging into one another. For example, by 1989, the section on economic development included a lengthy discussion of "developing a skilled workforce," and the education section in turn devoted one-third of its pages to "our workers, our future."²³ Governor John Engler continued this theme in his State of the State addresses, arguing that with the decline of manufacturing in Michigan, building a stronger workforce was a critical part of inter-state competition. For example, he titled his 1999 address "The Smart State First in the 21st Century."²⁴ From 1984 to the present, schooling in Michigan has been seen primarily in human capital terms.²⁵

The Maryland addresses show a similar shift, although given that the state is less reliant on manufacturing, the economy-education link is not as pronounced. The 1984 address by Democrat Harry Hughes calls for the “greatest increase in State aid to education in the history of our state.”²⁶ Subsequent addresses include mentions of the need for greater quality and excellence in education, reflecting the concerns of *A Nation at Risk*. Maryland more fully embraced the idea that its state economy was dependent upon the quality of its education system in the 1990s, when Governor Parris Glendening began to discuss the importance of “all our citizens reach[ing] their full potential in the knowledge-based economy of the future.”²⁷ As the economy frame for education became more prominent in Maryland, the share of the agenda devoted to education increased, providing further evidence for the link between the two.

Similar trends are evident in Utah. Early State of the States focus on the basic goal of expanding access to secondary education: the 1975 address called for making free public education available to all students in grades nine to twelve. In 1981, in the midst of a crisis of rising school population and diminishing revenues, Republican Governor Scott Matheson’s focus was on finding a way to provide minimally adequate funding for the basic upkeep of state schools. In Matheson’s 1983 address he spoke eloquently about the coming changes to a post-industrial society, noting the decline of smokestack industries and the projected growth of professional, managerial, technical and clerical jobs.²⁸ He concluded: “Education then – an investment in our human capital – is the key to economic growth in this new era. Utah has long been among the leading states in the literacy of its people.... Our challenge is to sustain our commitment to education and prepare our people to participate in the new technological age.”²⁹ In 1989, Governor Norman Bangerter spoke of education as an important part of “our economic development team,” making education, along with the economy, efficiency and the environment

the key priorities of his terms as Governor.³⁰ In 1996, Governor Leavitt made the economy-education link explicit, declaring that key businesses were settling in Utah because of the quality of its schools.³¹ In 2003, Leavitt launched yet another round of school reforms, arguing that “in the economic race of this century, the society with the best-educated people wins. Period. End of conversation.”³²

The changes in Utah’s goals and objectives for schooling, before and after *A Nation at Risk*, show clearly the impact that this increasing emphasis on the economy had on the direction of the school reform debate. The official state goals and objectives for education, as formulated in 1972 through a process that involved statewide community input, reveal a very different view of educational purpose from the human capital approach. This view still prevailed as recently as 1982. A state curriculum plan for the years 1982–88 summarizes the overall purpose of schooling as follows: “The education system is seen as a vehicle which provides for the growth of each individual as he searches for meaning and builds competencies in these eight important areas of his life.” The eight areas are “intellectual maturity,” “ethical-moral-spiritual maturity,” “emotional maturity,” “social maturity,” “physical maturity,” “environmental maturity,” “aesthetic maturity” and “productive maturity.” The 1982 goals show a concern with the spiritual, ethical, social and even existential purposes of schooling.

Shortly after *A Nation at Risk*, the State Board of Education (1984:1) reformulated its aims in a single sentence on the first page of its new “action goals.” The goals read, “The Utah State Board of Education sets as its primary goals the attainment of excellence in education and the improvement of productivity as expressed in the following objectives.” To the word productivity is appended a footnote, which reads, “The State Board of Education considers productivity in education to have several definitions, all of which are important in providing

excellence in education: (1) teaching an increased number of students for a given amount of money while maintaining current quality, (2) increasing quality for a given amount of money and a given number of students, and (3) increasing quality through increasing expenditures.” The new goals showed a dramatic shift to a more practical, economic, and utilitarian view of schooling’s purpose, consistent with the view outlined in *A Nation at Risk*.³³

INCREASING AGENDA STATUS AND INVOLVING NEW ACTORS

The change in how education was discussed led almost immediately to a change in how political attention was accorded to schooling. We can roughly track the lasting impact of *A Nation at Risk* on states’ political priorities by considering the space devoted to education in governors’ State of the State Addresses. Figure 1 displays the relative importance of education as an issue in governors’ State of the State addresses in each of the case study states between 1973 and 2005. The Y-axis measures the proportion of the total lines in the State of the State address devoted to elementary and secondary education. Note that in Utah, where the legislature met every other year until 1985, the State of the State address was also a bi-annual event until 1985.

[Figure 1 About Here]

This graph indicates a clear break in 1983. On average, Michigan governors devoted 4.8 percent of their addresses to education up through January of 1983, whereas in the period since *A Nation at Risk* they have devoted 19.2 percent to education. Results are similar in Utah: 4.8 percent of space in the addresses was devoted to education before *A Nation at Risk*, and 21 percent since. In Maryland, where the addresses are on average significantly longer and the number of topics covered greater, the total space devoted to education is less, but the fourfold rate of increase is similar: 2.7 percent before *A Nation at Risk*, and 10.8 percent since.

[Table 2 About Here]

The shift cannot be explained by partisanship. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the share of each address devoted to K-12 education, by governor. Governors of both parties devoted relatively little attention to education before *A Nation at Risk* and have devoted significantly more since. The most striking change was in Michigan, perhaps not surprisingly given that its troubled automobile industry was ripe for the *A Nation at Risk* message. Republican Governor William Milliken devoted 5.4% of his addresses between 1974 and 1982 to education and Democratic Governor James Blanchard did not devote any of his address to education in 1983. This shifted quickly after *A Nation at Risk*, as Blanchard devoted 14% of his address to education in 1984, and 16.6% of his total space to schooling between 1984 and 1990. Reflecting the raised agenda status of schooling, Republican Governor John Engler (1991-2002) devoted 20.4% of his addresses to education, and Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm (2003-05) has devoted 18.6% of her addresses to education. Similar trends are evident in Utah, where greater attention was paid to education in the addresses after *A Nation at Risk* under a string of almost exclusively Republican governors, and in Maryland, where an increase in agenda status after *A Nation at Risk* was evident in the addresses of the state's almost exclusively Democratic governors.

The shift in the definition and agenda status of the issue also brought in other new actors, particularly state legislators and business groups. As education became more central to economic growth, state legislators and business groups were no longer willing to leave schooling in the hands of local or state school boards. As one Michigan legislator dismissively put it in discussing education reform in the 1990s: "The State Board of Education wasn't a player. The Department of Ed wasn't a player."³⁴ The key players were now the governor, the state legislature, the unions, and, in some states, business coalitions demanding educational reform. By 1990,

Maryland and Michigan had state outposts of the national Business Roundtable that were beginning to advocate standards-based reform. These business leaders, like many state legislators, had gradually shifted their priorities in wake of *A Nation at Risk*. While they previously had opposed school reform as an expensive undertaking that would necessitate higher taxes, they were increasingly persuaded that a better bet would be to essentially socialize the costs of training their workers. By linking the educational and economic spheres, the paradigm of *A Nation at Risk* had weakened the longstanding claims of local school boards to have the final say on educational policy, and brought in more powerful state political and economic elites who now increasingly saw education policy as part of their purview.

CHANGING POLITICS AND POLICY: DEMOCRATS, REPUBLICANS CONVERGE; SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, UNIONS RESIST

Inevitably, the changes described above in who was involved in education and what was debated would manifest themselves in a series of policy reforms. Looking across the three states, we will see that the *A Nation at Risk* paradigm affected the goals of policymakers initiating reform, weakened the hand of unions who sought to resist the reforms, and created the broader public and interest group support that helped pass and sustain standards-based reform. The power of this paradigm thus helps to explain several of the puzzles listed above, including why a set of reforms triumphed despite the opposition of the strongest interest groups in its domain (puzzle 2), and why there was such wide policy convergence around standards-based reform among different actors (puzzle 3) and from both sides of the political spectrum (puzzle 4).

Across the three states, the initiating actors for standards-based reform came from the left and the right,[†] although the rationales for reform on both sides grew out of aspects of the paradigm crystallized in *A Nation at Risk*. Two distinct, but overlapping, visions emerged. One vision, mostly championed by mainstream Democrats on the left, emphasized the way that the changed economy would require higher skills for all students, particularly poor and minority students, if they were to have a decent shot at competing in a post-industrial economy. These equity liberals consistently supported standards as a way of seeking to ensure that all students gained these skills, and sometimes supported accountability as a top-down mechanism that would seek to ensure that schools were making the needed changes to improve students' skills. A second vision, championed by those on the right, focused less on the equity implications of *A Nation at Risk*'s analysis, and gave greater attention to the idea that state or national competitiveness would be threatened if workers did not gain higher skills. Coupled with this economic rationale was an emphasis on the need for accountability, as, in the right's view, external pressure was needed to force a recalcitrant educational establishment to change. Both of these views shared *A Nation at Risk*'s assumptions about the relationship between education and the economy; the need for across the board rather than targeted improvement; the emphasis on schools as opposed to society as the locus of change; and the need for external accountability for results.

Maryland provides an example of the movement for standards from the left. The impetus in Maryland was a 1989 commission report known as the "Sondheim Report," named after its

[†] "Left" and "right" here are broad terms that encompass elected officials, advocacy groups, and others on each side of the American political spectrum who came to support the standards movement for different reasons. This was a coalition of mainstream liberals and conservatives in the middle against those further to the left and right. In contrast to the majority coalition, there were a smaller number of actors further to the left who opposed the standards movement because it held students accountable without supplying sufficient opportunities to learn, and a similar group on the far right that opposed the standards movement for overextending state and federal reach into local schools.

chair, Walter Sondheim. The report called for a public accountability system for all of Maryland's schools, driven by high standards set by the state, to be enforced by a system of accreditation that would evaluate whether each school was meeting those standards. The commission was appointed and given its charge by Democratic Governor William Donald Schaefer, who was drawing upon an earlier memo written by Maryland State Superintendent David Hornbeck. Hornbeck's goals, as expressed in a 1987 memo and in an interview with the author, were to utilize the newfound emphasis on school accountability both to spur improved practice in failing Baltimore city schools and to convince legislators to increase their funding with the promise of greater results for those dollars. In Maryland, one of the "bluest" states in the nation, the push for accountability came out of a desire of those on the left at the state level to take control over, and increase funding for, what state actors saw as failing high poverty schools.

In Utah, by contrast, the movement for standards-based reform was largely championed by the political right. Utah developed some early standards-based policies in the wake of *A Nation at Risk*,³⁵ but these policies were underdeveloped in comparison to the comprehensive models that had been developed in some other states. An influential white paper by former Utah State Superintendent John Bennion summarized the efforts of three of these leading states (Maryland, Texas, Kentucky), and his work was picked up under the accountability banner by Republican State representative Tammy Rowan. Rowan had become convinced that the school system was unduly lax in its standards as she watched her own daughter being passed from grade to grade despite her weak reading skills.³⁶ After reading Bennion's paper, Rowan began to advocate a Texas-style system of accountability, initiating a legislative task force that laid the groundwork for what would become Utah's standards-based system. Reflecting impatience with the rate of improvement in the school system, Republicans in both the governor's office and the

legislature argued for a system that placed heavier emphasis on outcomes. Republican State Senator Howard Stephenson, the co-chair of the Task Force, argued in its initial meeting that a greater emphasis on results was needed: “We've done a lot...but where are the results?” he asked.³⁷ Republican Governor Mike Leavitt supported this view at a conference sponsored by the commission, stressing that “we see the results in the inputs but not the results we want to see in the outputs.”³⁸ In a heavily Republican state with few minority students, the rationale for reform lay not in preparing disadvantaged students for the new economy, but rather in a desire to hold an underperforming school system accountable for results.

If Maryland and Utah represent the “blue state” and “red state” versions of the drive for standards-based reform, the story in Michigan was that of a “purple state” in which Democrats and Republicans alternated in the push for standards-based reform, but with different rationales and policy tools. The need for reform of some sort was accepted by both parties beginning in the mid 1980s, as the message of *A Nation at Risk* resonated with the declining Michigan automobile industry. A prominent 1987 Michigan commission on school finance comprised of leaders from business, industry, agriculture, labor, education and government echoed the declensionist rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk*: “Michigan has a long and honored tradition of providing quality, equitable educational services for all of its people. This tradition is now in jeopardy.”³⁹ In response to this crisis, Michigan political leaders took a series of steps towards standards-based reform that can be roughly grouped into two movements: a movement focused around *standards*, led by Democrats in the early part of the 1990s, and one for *accountability*, pioneered by Republican Governor John Engler in the later part of the 1990s. The first movement was embodied in the push for a state core curriculum, which many, particularly on the left, saw as a mechanism to create greater similarity and therefore equity among Michigan’s many districts.

Over the objections of some conservatives who thought that a state curriculum impeded local control, the Michigan legislature passed a voluntary core curriculum in 1990, and a mandatory core curriculum in 1993. When Republicans took full control of the state legislature as part of the 1994 Gingrich revolution, they abolished the core as an infringement upon local control. However, Governor Engler continued to demand accountability through performance on state tests, seeking to tighten state accreditation standards and close schools that were not making sufficient progress on these tests. The push for accountability reflected a familiar conservative belief about the unwillingness of schools and unions to make needed changes. As one Republican legislator said, “The schools are not going to change unless change is forced upon them.”⁴⁰ Overall, while some important differences between the parties remained, both supported some version of standards or accountability, drawing upon *A Nation at Risk*'s assumptions about the schools as the primary source of economic decline and the corresponding need for system-wide reform.

That many Democrats and Republicans had converged did not mean that there was consensus around educational accountability. Rather, the new cleavages were institutional rather than partisan, with the central divisions now between state politicians and officials who were holding the accountability strings, and teachers, who were the ones being held to account. In all three states, teachers unions vehemently protested the move for greater accountability, arguing that accountability by testing was unfair or unproductive. A survey by the Maryland State Teachers Association (Maryland's largest teachers' union and the state affiliate of the NEA) found that its members thought the proposed accountability and accreditation measures had “limited value” and that a better approach would be to help tackle the problems they faced by removing disruptive students, providing help for clerical chores, and freeing teachers from tasks

such as monitoring lunchrooms. MSTA leader Jane Stern publicly challenged the merits of the program in a joint appearance with commission chair Walter Sondheim on the *Today Show* in 1989 shortly after the Sondheim report was released.⁴¹ Similarly, the Michigan Education Association (MEA), one of the most powerful teachers unions in the country, argued in the early 1990s that standardized testing, particularly for minority students, was likely to be harmful, and “encourag[ed the] curtailment or elimination of group standardized, aptitude or achievement assessments until such time as a critical appraisal of current testing programs [has] taken place.” The MEA also asserted that “teachers must have a say in determining who will be assessed, when, and on what; which assessments to use and why.” In Utah, almost a decade later, a similar pattern prevailed, as the Utah Education Association appropriated their opponents’ favorite word and argued that legislators needed to be “held accountable” as well. Phyllis Sorenson, president of the Utah Education Association, made this argument repeatedly: “For me, the bottom line is: If they want to hold schools accountable, then, by darn, legislators should be held accountable for the amount that is spent on education.”⁴² Teachers also argued that the scores would simply reflect the backgrounds from which their students came. “This can be compared to students being graded according to their height and father's yearly income, and it is unfair,” said sixth grader teacher Amy Martz. “Your threats...will only disrupt students, demoralize teachers and disable communities.”⁴³ Finally, teachers also argued that they were professionals whose authority and discretion should be respected. Teachers were not shy about voicing what they felt was an unwarranted abrogation of their authority. “You people need to quit threatening us and come into the classroom and see what it is we do,” said teacher Deanna Johnson at a public forum on the proposed reforms.⁴⁴ “I would never tell a doctor or lawyer how to run his practice,” she added. “You need to come spend more time in the classroom.”⁴⁵

But on each of these grounds—that tests were not good measures of school quality; that funding was the key to improvement; that society and not schools should be responsible for test scores; and that teachers should be trusted to improve their own practice—the arguments of the teachers and their unions were running in the face of the paradigm set by *A Nation at Risk*. In Michigan, Engler was able to effectively create a distinction between teachers, to whom he pledged respect and admiration, and teachers’ unions, which he fought as an enemy of excellence and free enterprise (Boyd, Plank and Sykes 2000). A September 1993 Free Press poll found that 58 percent of the Michigan citizenry either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that teachers’ unions were too powerful.⁴⁶ In Maryland, Governor Schaefer repeatedly portrayed teachers in the media as agents of the status quo. On the day the report was released, he said, “Whenever you try to shake up education, you immediately run into a lot of problems because people love the status quo. I just hope the report shakes up education and sends us in a new direction.”⁴⁷ Editorials in *The Baltimore Sun*, *the Evening Sun*, and the *Washington Post* all endorsed the commission’s recommendations using similar reasoning, further rhetorically isolating the education community and emboldening the reformers.⁴⁸ Finally, in Utah, arguments for professional control were rebuffed by critics like Rowan, who, using the “no excuses” framework, were not mollified by the appeal to professional expertise. “The task force’s ultimate goal is to no longer make or accept excuses about why children can't learn but instead to do whatever it takes to help every child learn the basics of math, reading and language," wrote Rowan in *The Deseret News*. “This is the very minimum of what we should expect from our schools.”⁴⁹ By labeling the impact of social background as an excuse rather than a legitimate difficulty in the schooling process, Rowan was mobilizing one of the critical assumptions of *A Nation at Risk* against criticisms from teachers. In all three states, standards

and accountability legislation was victorious, as the material resources of the unions were negated by a rhetorical climate that undermined many of their strongest arguments.

Finally, the paradigm of *A Nation at Risk* not only put teachers on the rhetorical defensive; it also created a set of allies for the standards and accountability movement. The paradigm had convinced legislators from left and right; it also had been embraced by the business community, state departments of education, some civil rights groups, and the public across the three states. These groups, despite their differences, sat on the right side of the institutional divide—demanding accountability rather than being subject to it. The lead actors varied considerably across the states—a state superintendent in Maryland, a policy entrepreneur and a state legislator in Utah, state legislators and a governor in Michigan—but what appears to be theoretical chaos from the perspective of an actor-based theory instead appears theoretically ordered from the perspective of an ideational one. All of these actors shared an overlapping view of the problem drawn from *A Nation at Risk*, and, more broadly, they sat on one side of a set of institutional cleavages created by the new paradigm.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF FEDERAL POLICY: THE LONG SHADOWS OF A NATION AT RISK

The consensus around standards-based reform at the state level paved the road for federal standards legislation, first in two pieces of legislation in 1994 (Goals 2000 and the reauthorization of the ESEA) and then in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Table 3 briefly summarizes the trajectory of federal reform. Unlike the state reforms, the details of the federal reform have been well-described by previous scholars (see Jennings 1998, McGuinn 2006, DeBray 2006), so I focus here briefly on four conceptual points about the power of the *A Nation at Risk* paradigm in setting the direction for reform and particularly in enabling a major shift towards federal control (puzzle #5).⁵⁰

[Table 3 About Here]

First, *A Nation at Risk* provided the impetus and basis for what became the federal movement for reform. The meeting between President George H.W. Bush and the nation's governors at Charlottesville (the Charlottesville Summit) in 1989 is widely agreed to be the first step at the federal level towards standards-based reform (McGuinn, 2006; Vinovskis, 1999). For the governors, it reflected an effort to create national support for a state school reform movement which had been developing since *A Nation at Risk*. For the president, it provided a way to stake his claim to an issue that had been rising in voters' concerns since *A Nation at Risk* (Hess and McGuinn 2002). While there has been some disagreement about whether the governors or the president initiated the meeting,⁵¹ the important point from this perspective is that the two groups were able to come together because they had a similar understanding of the educational problem, as the joint communiqué released at the end of the meeting suggested: "The President and the nation's Governors agree that a better educated citizenry is the key to the continued growth and prosperity of the United States... [A]s a Nation we must have an educated workforce, second to none, in order to succeed in an increasingly competitive world economy." The key outcome of the meeting was a set of National Education Goals, a series of educational targets that the nation would aim to meet by 2000. These goals also reflected the paradigm defined by *A Nation at Risk* in that they focused primarily on output targets rather than increased inputs. Most notably, they promised that America would be first in the world in international tests of math and science by 2000, a goal that was consistent with the focus on international competition in *A Nation at Risk*.

Second, the convergence of a redefined educational paradigm with broader changes in party politics in the 1990s and early 2000s created a context in which leaders of both parties saw advantage in pushing a centrist agenda of standards-based reform at the federal level. The push

to embrace federal standards-based reform came in two movements: President Clinton brought Democrats on board for Goals 2000 and the 1994 ESEA legislation, and President George W. Bush brought along Republicans for No Child Left Behind in 2001. For President Clinton, federal support for standards was a natural extension of the work he had done on standards in Arkansas and as the governor's co-chair at the Charlottesville Summit. It also supported his claim to be a New Democrat, as holding schools accountable and challenging the teachers unions enabled him to separate himself from old-style liberals' argument that fixing schools meant sending more money. Taking on a Democratic Congress who wanted the 1994 ESEA reauthorization to be primarily about funneling greater resources to high poverty students, Clinton successfully argued, consistent with both *A Nation at Risk* and his New Democrat philosophy, that the path to improved performance was not more money but higher standards and greater accountability for results. For President George W. Bush, education proved to be the perfect issue on which to stake his claim to be a "compassionate conservative," mixing traditionally liberal ends of creating opportunities for disadvantaged students with conservative means of standards and accountability. Bush renounced the longtime Republican stance in favor of abolishing the Department of Education in favor of a Texas-style regime of more tests and accountability, substantially erasing the nearly 30 point edge that Democrats had previously held on the educational issue. When he made education reform his primary domestic initiative during his first year, he was able to bring over Republicans in Congress who had previously been hostile to greater degrees of federal control (see Rudalevige, 2003 and DeBray, 2006 for more detail on the Congressional politics). Overall, both presidents did tack to the center as the median voter theorem would predict, but *A Nation at Risk* is important in explaining the context in which it came to be rational to do so. *A Nation at Risk* set the parameters for what seemed like sensible

centrist education reform, and it triggered the state reform movement that gave these former governors experience with standards in the first place.⁵²

Third, the new paradigm created a wide basis of support behind the standards-based vision at the federal level. This coalition, developed in the early 1990s, was critical to the passage of the 1994 ESEA, and was similarly supportive of No Child Left Behind. As in the states, these groups came from left and right, with concerns ranging from economic competitiveness to greater equity—they supported similar policies, but not for the same reasons. Business groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, the National Alliance of Business, and most prominently the Business Roundtable, began to throw their support behind educational reform as a central input in the battle for international economic competitiveness. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers were each comprised of many members who were pursuing some version of standards and accountability in their states; these collective associations in turn advocated federal assistance to state standards-based reform. Equity driven groups like the Education Trust and the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights also became strong backers of standards-based reform. Influential policy academics came on board, most notably Stanford’s Marshall “Mike” Smith, who is credited with an influential early formulation of standards-based reform (Smith & O’Day, 1991), and the Fordham Foundation’s Checker Finn, perhaps the best-known conservative commentator on education reform. These groups and individuals helped to develop the framework for standards based-reform in the early 1990s and provided critical direction and support for federal standards legislation. When Clinton drew together his policy team, much of its expertise came from those who had been extensively involved in the standards movement, including Secretary of Education Richard Riley, the former governor of South Carolina, undersecretary of Education Mike Cohen, who had been the NGA’s

lead education staffer at Charlottesville and was former co-president of the National Alliance for Restructuring Education, and Mike Smith, the co-author of the systemic reform framework. As was the case in the states, this wide coalition was able to overcome the objections of the NEA to greater accountability.⁵³

Fourth and finally, the paradigm enabled the expansion of the federal role (puzzle #5) because the paradigm had created a convergence among state reforms on which the federal government could piggyback without seeming overly intrusive. Forty-two states had some version of standards by 1994, and the federal legislation was crafted to expand upon these existing efforts. Goals 2000 funded the development of state standards, and Improving America's Schools Act, which was the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, predicated the delivery of Title I funds on the development of state standards-based reform. While George H.W. Bush's proposal for *national* standards had gone down to political defeat, Clinton was able to head off the most virulent objections to national control by building on *state* standards. No Child Left Behind in turn built upon the framework established in the 1994 reforms—an "evolution" not a "revolution" as one scholar put it⁵⁴—but added a harder edge of accountability. In a neat move of jujitsu, federal policymakers and advocacy groups simultaneously drew upon the existence of state action to claim legitimacy for federal reforms that built on top of them, but criticized the slow and uneven pace of state reforms to argue that more stringent federal measures were necessary.⁵⁵ The result was No Child Left Behind, which simultaneously deferred to states in the content of the standards and the cut scores for success, but also created a series of requirements—mandating annual tests in years 3-8 and creating an escalating series of sanctions for schools that did not improve—that substantially increased federal requirements for states and schools. In the longer view, by creating a

movement of state reform, *A Nation at Risk* enabled the federal government to gradually expand its influence in a previously local realm by creating a state consensus (49 states had adopted standards by 2001) upon which the federal government could piggyback.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

American educational policy was transformed between 1980 and 2001. Standards and accountability rose to the top of the state and federal political agenda; longstanding cleavages between Democrats and Republicans diminished as the two parties united behind top-down reform; and longstanding traditions of local control gave way to unprecedented state and then federal involvement. These changes were sparked by the emergence of a newly dominant paradigm, which emphasized schooling's economic importance, the need for across-the-board improvement, the responsibility of schools rather than society for tackling the reform challenges, and measurement of success by test scores. This powerful paradigm sparked changes throughout the political landscape around education reform, raising the agenda status of the issue, bringing in powerful actors who previously were uninterested in the issue, and setting and delimiting the direction of the debate. At both the state and federal level, it created new cleavages between political elites and advocacy groups demanding greater accountability and standardization from above, and teachers and their representatives seeking to maintain greater autonomy and discretion at the school level. Over time, first states and then the federal government settled on standards-based reform as the vehicle for these changes; standards and accountability were consistent with the new paradigm, and drew support from left, center, and right, although not always for the same reasons.

This idea-centered account can explain the puzzling aspects of these changes that are unexplained by other approaches. The shift to a post-industrial economy, with an accompanying

claim that individual, state, and national economic viability depended on improved educational performance, accounts for the increase in the attention devoted to education reform (puzzle #1). The paradigm contained themes from the mainstream left and right: from the left a desire to promote equity by increasing standards, particularly in high poverty schools; from the right a sense that the system was averse to change and required external pressure for reform. Both of these strands were captured in *A Nation at Risk* and in standards-based reform,⁵⁶ making the paradigm and the policy attractive to elites on both sides of the political spectrum (puzzle #2). The key actors pushing standards-based reform varied from case to case because they were all operating within a paradigm that gave them a similar definition of the problem; what looks like theoretical chaos from an actor-centered perspective looks relatively straight-forward from an ideational one (puzzle #3). The combination of this coalition and a changed rhetorical climate that depicted teachers unions as defenders of an increasingly defunct status quo effectively neutralized the unions' considerable material power, explaining why the reforms ran counter to the desires of the single strongest actors in the system (puzzle #4). Finally, the new paradigm explains the institutional shifts that resulted in greater state and later federal involvement (puzzle #5). By emphasizing the economic effects of schooling, the new paradigm gave state legislators a stake in an arena that had been outside of their scope, and by setting a common direction for the debate, it created enough similarity among state reforms for the federal government to extend its reach by building on these reforms.

This argument fills gaps left by other accounts of these same changes. Much previous work has focused on the *federal* politics of education (Manna, 2006; McGuinn, 2006; DeBray, 2006; Kosar, 2005; Cross 2004), while paying little empirical attention to the *state* origins of the reforms (but see McDermott, 2011). The account presented here develops evidence on the states,

showing how states with different political histories came to take similar approaches, which in turn enabled federal reforms. Previous accounts, particularly Manna (2006), have shown how America's federal system provides opportunities for borrowing of educational policy between levels of government, but in their emphasis on institutional structures, they offer less of an account of the *timing* of the reforms or their *substantive content*. In contrast, by focusing on how the emergence of a paradigm structured subsequent policy reform, this argument offers an explanation of why the reforms emerged when they did and why they took the particular substantive form that they did. Finally, previous accounts have emphasized how strategic politicians on both left and right moved to claim the center on educational policy (DeBray, 2006; Kosar, 2005) and have briefly alluded to the historical context in which these shifts took place. The argument presented here moves the history of this changing context to center stage, offering a theoretical account of exactly how and why the context shifted such that accountability and federal control become mainstream policy positions.

This piece also seeks to contribute to the literature on ideas in politics by closely documenting how a new paradigm was able to reshape a variety of aspects of the social and political landscape, eventually resulting in new policy and major institutional shifts in responsibility. The new paradigm affected the content of what was being discussed, the agenda status of the issue, the players involved, their standing to speak, and the venue in which the issue was debated. Paradigms create politics, and can explain major shifts not only in what key policymakers think, but also in the social and political landscape that surrounds an issue.

This perspective reflects a cultural ontology that both complements and challenges interest group approaches. It complements these perspectives in that it does not seek to deny that interest groups matter or that the nature of decision rules affects outcomes. But, at a deeper level,

it challenges the notion that groups have pre-set “interests” or that institutions have given realms of authority. Rather it suggests that the content of interests need to be defined, as do the scope of institutional responsibilities. Ideas are not opposed to interests and institutions. Interests and institutions *are* ideas about what we should be for and who should decide what. Understanding how paradigms shape politics illustrates concretely the way in which a changing menu of ideas can recast the purposes and goals of interest groups and institutions.

Finally, understanding the causes and consequences of new paradigms can help to explain the vexing questions of ‘path shaping’ change. Path dependent forms of historical institutionalism have been critiqued as seeming to foreclose the potential for significant change, as actors’ agency is constrained by historical choices often made decades ago (Clemens & Cook, 1999). This account, by contrast, joins some recent institutionalist scholars (Thelen, 2004; Streeck & Thelen 2005; Lieberman, 2002) in emphasizing how a multiplicity of ideas, logics, or orders are always at play (Binder, 2007; Davies & Binder, 2007), creating recurring opportunities for change. Once these diverse strands are linked together into a powerful master narrative, they can reverberate outwards, creating changes in the politics, policy, institutional control, and substantive direction of entire policy arenas.

Figure 1: Proportion of Michigan, Utah and Maryland State of State Addresses Devoted to Elementary and Secondary Education, 1973-2005

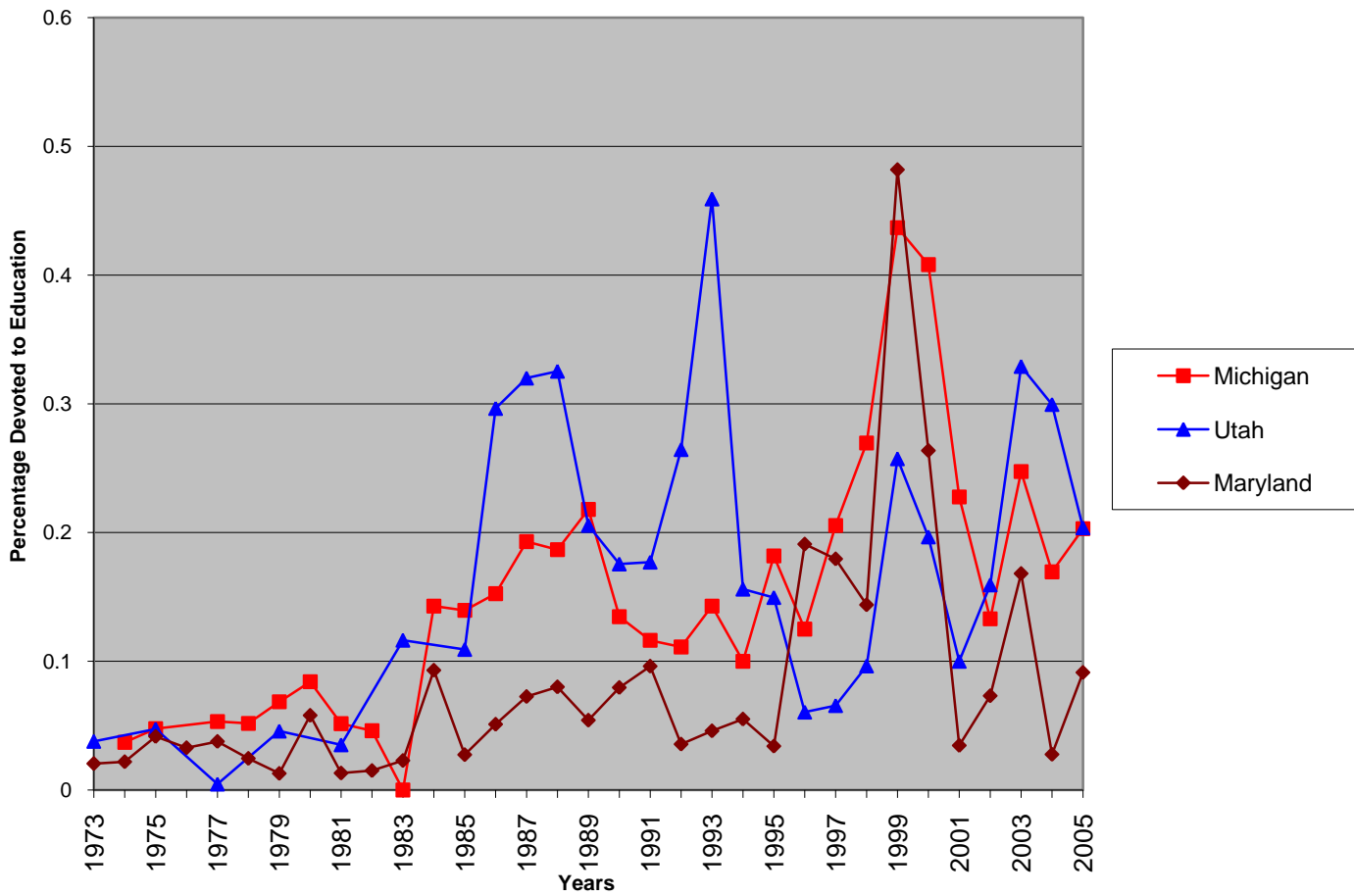


Table 1: *A Nation at Risk* and Redefining the Educational Problem

| <u>Dimension</u> | <u>Previous problem definition</u> | <u>Problem Definition in <i>A Nation at Risk</i></u> | <u>Factors that Fed Into Changing Problem Definition</u> |
|--|---|--|---|
| Purpose of education | Diverse, no one purpose dominant | Education a tool of economic development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National perception that education is key for international economic competition • State perception that education is key for economic development (particularly Southern governors) • Increase in individual returns to schooling |
| Goals of reform | Categorical programs for disadvantaged groups; increased performance of low performing students (minimum competency movement) | Higher standards for all students, “excellence” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State economic competition, spurring higher standards • Standards a reaction to perception of 1960s Progressivism in schools • Excellence for all an antidote to perceived excesses of equity emphasis |
| Responsibility for schooling | Shared between parents, schools, and government | Educators primarily responsible for schooling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of conservative political economy and retreat from social responsibility for schooling • Effective schools research |
| Outcome measure/site of accountability | Qualitative standards set by local school and school board | External tests, accountable to state | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum competency testing • Greater state spending/perception that increasing spending not producing results • Changing image of teachers as interest groups (unionization, collective bargaining, teacher strikes) • Declining public view of schools; low performance on international tests; other dyspeptic reports on American education |

Table 2: Proportion of Michigan, Utah and Maryland State of State Addresses Devoted to K-12 Education, By Governor, 1973-2005

| <u>Michigan</u> | | <u>Utah</u> | | <u>Maryland</u> | |
|------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|--|-------|
| <i>Before A Nation at Risk</i> | | | | | |
| William Milliken (R) 1974-1982 | 5.4% | Calvin Rampton (R) 1973-1978 | 3.0% | Marvin Mandel (D) 1973-1977 | 3.1% |
| James Blanchard (D) 1983 | 0.0% | Scott Matheson (R) 1979-1983 | 6.6% | Blair Lee (D) 1978 | 2.4% |
| | | | | Harry Hughes (D) 1979-83 | 2.4% |
| <i>After A Nation at Risk</i> | | | | | |
| James Blanchard (D) 1984-1990 | 16.6% | Norman Bangerter (D) 1985-1992 | 23.4% | Harry Hughes (D) 1984-1986 | 5.7% |
| John Engler (R) 1991-2002 | 20.4% | Michael Leavitt (R) 1993-2003 | 18.4% | William Donald Schaefer (D) 1987-1994 | 6.4% |
| Jennifer Granholm (D) 2003-2005 | 18.6% | Olene Walker (R) 2004 | 29.9% | Parris Glendening (D) 1995-2002 | 17.5% |
| | | James Huntsman (R) 2005 | 20.3% | Robert Ehrlich (R) 2003-2005 | 9.5% |

Table 3: Developments of Federal Education Policy, 1989-2001

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Event</u> | <u>Details</u> |
|-------------|--|--|
| 1989 | National Education Summit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Governors and President George H.W. Bush meet in Charlottesville. Agree to National Education Goals, including goals to improve performance in math and science (first in the world by 2000); also agree to assess students' performance at 4th, 8th and 12th grades. |
| 1991 | America 2000 (failed legislation) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proposed creation of voluntary <i>national</i> standards. ▪ Was not enacted. ▪ Championed by President George H.W. Bush; opposition from Republicans to federal control and Democrats to testing defeats legislation. |
| 1994 | Goals 2000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Congressional legislation that provides seed money for states to voluntarily develop standards. ▪ Avoids fight over <i>national</i> standards by focusing on <i>state</i> standards. ▪ Championed by President Bill Clinton, supported by Democratic Congress; opposition from Republicans seeking to limit federal role in schools. |
| 1994 | Improving America's Schools Act (1994 reauthorization of the ESEA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Passed after Goals 2000. ▪ Conditions Title I money on the development of state standards and assessments. Introduces idea that states should show "adequate yearly progress" in return for Title I funds. ▪ Avoids fight over <i>national</i> standards by letting <i>states</i> set standards. ▪ Sets policy framework for what would become No Child Left Behind. ▪ Championed by President Bill Clinton, supported by Democratic Congress; opposition from Republicans seeking to limit federal role in schools. |
| 2001-2 | No Child Left Behind (2001 reauthorization of the ESEA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evolution, not revolution, from 1994 ESEA. Same framework of federal government building on state standards-based reform. ▪ Adds harder edge of accountability: annual student testing in grade 3-8, escalating set of sanctions if schools do not make "adequate yearly progress." ▪ Other big change is new support from Republicans. Championed by President George W. Bush; overwhelming bipartisan approval in both Senate and House. |

Appendix Table A1: Variation Among States Chosen for Case Studies

| <u>State</u> | <u>Utah</u> | <u>Michigan</u> | <u>Maryland</u> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Initial Test scores | High | Moderate | High |
| Initial per pupil spending | Low (lowest in the nation) | Moderate | High |
| Minority Population | Low | High | High |
| Political Context | Republican | Mixed | Democratic |
| Level of Local Control | Moderate | High | Low |
| Finance Equity Cases | No | Yes | Yes |
| Political Culture | Moralistic | Moralistic | Individualistic |
| Initial State Educational Capacity | Low | High | High |

Notes: Test scores, per pupil spending, and minority population are from the State Politics and Policy Quarterly Database. They are measured as of 1988, before the movement to standards-based reform. Political culture is from (Elazar 1984) and finance equity data comes from (Reed 2001). Political context refers to control of the legislature and the governorship. Political context is for the 1990s, the period when the reforms took place. Classifications of initial state capacity are based on interviews with my respondents.

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Notes

¹ There is one important exception to this claim. The national American Federation of Teachers (AFT), when led by Al Shanker, was for the most part supportive of standards and accountability. Elsewhere I have argued that Shanker's support was also a byproduct of the paradigm created by *A Nation at Risk* (Mehta 2013a).

² Technically, states could choose to opt out of the requirements of No Child Left Behind by refusing the money that comes with federal support of education through Title I. While some states threatened to pull out, no state did so.

³ It should be noted that the national AFT has shown greater support of standards and accountability, due in large part to the leadership of Albert Shanker, although local AFT affiliates have not been as supportive.

⁴ As Paul Pierson (2003) has emphasized, rational choice theories are among the modes of political science explanation that employ a short time horizon, with the consequence of minimizing potentially more important longer-term causes

⁵ Evidence on Maryland, Michigan and Utah comes from this study; on Kentucky and particularly Texas, see Toch (1991).

⁶ For example, compare Skocpol (1979) to Rueschemeyer and Skocpol (1996).

⁷ On the necessity of integrating the normative and the empirical, see Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact-Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁸ Baumgartner and Jones (1993) also discuss the effects of changing issue definition on politics—the difference here is that this article seeks to more specifically map the different dimensions that are changed when a problem definition changes.

⁹ See also Schattschneider (1960) and Baumgartner and Jones (1993).

¹⁰ This view differs from other accounts of the policy process. It complements John Kingdon's (1984) well-known account of the way in which policy entrepreneurs link the problem, policy, and politics streams in key policy windows. Kingdon's account does well to explain the politics of enactment in the short-term; the approach I've developed here explains why there is continuity in the agenda over the longer run, explaining how the context is created in which actors make their short-term calculations. The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier 1999) has some similarities in that it too is also concerned with actors and ideas, but this framework gives more emphasis to the way that ideas in the problem space inspire, frame and delimit the positions actors' take, whereas ACF is more about actors using ideas to find allies and build coalitions. Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) punctuated equilibrium model is perhaps the closest to the argument developed here, and I build on their work, but this piece differs by specifically delineating the array of mechanisms through which new paradigms can reshape politics.

¹¹ The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act premised Title I aid on development of standards-based reform, but subsequent reports showed that states were uneven in their development of standards, and no money was ever taken away.

¹² Thus in total, this study considers four case studies of the movement to standards-based reform, three at the state level, and one at the federal level. Increasing the number of cases within the larger case study provides for greater confidence in the evaluation of causal inferences (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994).

¹³ Kirst and Wirt (1982: 250).

¹⁴ Bell (1988).

¹⁵ The other two were Charles A. Foster, who was the immediate past president of the Foundation for Teaching Economics, and Annette Y. Kirk, wife of conservative intellectual Russell Kirk, whose affiliation at the time was given as "Kirk Associates."

¹⁶ Edward Fiske, "Commission on Education Warns 'Tide of Mediocrity' Imperils U.S." *New York Times*, April 27, 1983, page A1.

¹⁷ Guthrie and Springer (2004: 12).

¹⁸ Guthrie and Springer (2004: 14).

¹⁹ As they write, "We conclude that declines in educational performance are in large part the result of disturbing inadequacies in the way the educational process itself is often conducted." While the report repeatedly mentioned the importance of a wide variety of stakeholders, including parents, students, unions, business groups and legislatures, its call for excellence focused primarily on schools themselves as the prime enforcers of a new set of expectations (National Commission on Educational Excellence 1983).

²⁰ Firestone (1990: 145).

²¹ William Milliken, "State of the State Address," 1982.

- ²² James Blanchard, "State of the State Address," 1984.
- ²³ James Blanchard, "State of the State Address," 1989.
- ²⁴ John Engler, "State of the State Address," 1999.
- ²⁵ Given the growing conflation of educational and economic ends, the share of the addresses devoted to education would grow even further if discussion of schooling in the sections on economic development were included in the count. (To allow for comparability over time, the measure used in the charts and figure is limited to the sections that are devoted only to education, excluding mentions of education in the sections on the economy.) Roughly 30 percent of the 2000 address, for example, was devoted to education if mentions of education in the economic development section are included.
- ²⁶ Harry Hughes, "State of the State Address," 1984.
- ²⁷ Parris Glendening, "State of the State Address," 1999.
- ²⁸ This address actually came shortly before the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in April of 1983. My full argument in a book in progress, which is necessarily abridged here, suggests that while the *agenda status* of education showed a sharp and discontinuous change after *A Nation at Risk*, the change in the problem definition was happening more gradually. Specifically, changes to the economy made it clear to a wide variety of analysts that schooling would become more important economically; *A Nation at Risk* was the report that crystallized this message and gave it much wider currency, but it was not the first to identify these developments.
- ²⁹ Scott Matheson, "State of the State Address," 1989.
- ³⁰ Norman Bangerter, "State of the State Address," 1989.
- ³¹ Michael Leavitt, "State of the State Address," 1996.
- ³² Michael Leavitt, "State of the State Address," 2003.
- ³³ While it is of course true that economic mobility has always been one of the major purposes of schooling, the period since *A Nation at Risk* has shown an elevation of the economic purpose over the other purposes of schooling.
- ³⁴ Personal interview, October 2004.
- ³⁵ Beginning shortly after *A Nation at Risk*, the state developed a core curriculum (1984), norm-referenced tests for all 5th, 8th and 11th graders (1990), and criterion-referenced tests (1990s) for a sample of students.
- ³⁶ Jeffrey P. Haney, "Setting School Standards - Utahns Looking at Ways to Hold Teachers, Students Accountable," *The Deseret News*, May 31st, 1999.
- ³⁷ Jennifer Toomer-Cook, "Education Group Talks Roles, Goals," *The Deseret News*, May 11th, 1999.
- ³⁸ Jennifer Toomer-Cook, "Schools Must Do Better – Or Else?" *The Deseret News*, September 7th, 1999.
- ³⁹ *Michigan School Finance Commission*, Edgar Harden and Phillip Runkel, co-chairs, page 4.
- ⁴⁰ Vergari (1996: 213).
- ⁴¹ In Stern's telling, the primary problem was resources; accountability was a way of deferring legislative responsibility. Politicians "have it backward," she said in her yearly address to the MSTA in November of 1989. "When they tell us that there's no more money for education, we should tell them they're not really trying and that they should try harder." Jay Merwin, "Cut Talk, Boost Funds, Teachers Says," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, January 4th, 1989.
- ⁴² Haney (May 31st, 1999).
- ⁴³ Katherine Kapos, "Testing Plan Irks Teachers," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, October 21st, 1999.
- ⁴⁴ Kapos (October 21st, 1999).
- ⁴⁵ Jennifer Toomer-Cook, "Educators Flay Standardized Tests," *The Deseret News*, October 21st, 1999.
- ⁴⁶ Vergari (1996: 173).
- ⁴⁷ Kathy Lally, "Md. Task Force Proposes Public School Rating System," *The Baltimore Sun*, 16A, August 23rd, 1989.
- ⁴⁸ The *Baltimore Sun* wrote that the report's recommendations were "so common-sensical they are bound to be controversial. Educators, after all, are often distinguished by professional arrogance" which has "put them increasingly at odds with the politicians who hold the purse strings." The *Evening Sun* picked up on the resources theme, arguing that "how money is spent can be as important as how much is spent." See "Quality Control in Education," *The Baltimore Sun*, 18A, August 23rd, 1989; "Accountable Schools," *The Evening Sun*, A20, August 24th, 1989; "A New Way to Judge Schools," *The Washington Post*, A20, August 26th, 1989.
- ⁴⁹ Representative Tammy Rowan, "Task Force's Goal is to Aid Utah Students," *The Deseret News*, December 3rd, 1999.
- ⁵⁰ It also provides an additional case for understanding why left and right converged (puzzle #2), why a variety of actors supported reform (puzzle #3), and why unions were unable to defeat it (puzzle #4).

⁵¹ The conventional understanding is that Bush initiated the meeting; Manna (2006) argued that the impetus came from the governors.

⁵² For Bush in particular, he inherited a state movement that was already underway. The Texas school accountability system, which was put in place shortly after *A Nation at Risk* and which Bush continued when he became governor in 1994 (Rudalevige (2003: 50, note 28)

⁵³ Of the two major unions, the NEA has been particularly publicly opposed to accountability; the story of the AFT is more complicated. For details, see Koppich (2005).

⁵⁴ McDonnell (2005).

⁵⁵ A 1999 report from the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights sharply criticized the lack of implementation of the 1994 ESEA. Their analysis revealed "wide variance in the degree to which states have complied with the new Title I," with some states still resistant to adopting standards-based reform. Arguing that these states were subverting the intention of the law, the Commission noted: "Many states and local officials have received the impression that the new Title I is largely a deregulation law that will free them from bothersome federal conditions, and have failed to understand that the tradeoff in the law is higher standards and accountability for results," (Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, Corrinne M. Yu and William L. Taylor, *Title I in Midstream: The Fight to Improve Schools for Poor Kids* (Washington DC: Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, 1999)).

⁵⁶ Standards-based reform was thus a centrist policy vehicle that appealed to both left and right. Other policy proposals, particularly market-based approaches, were also consistent with some of the assumptions of *A Nation at Risk* (as well as a broader conservative shift in the political economy), but were not able to win as widespread support as standards because they drew supporters from the right but were opposed by portions of the left. At both the state and federal levels, conservatives like Engler and George W. Bush jettisoned market-based proposals in favor of standards-based ones in order to pick up enough support from the left to assure passage.