

BOOK REVIEWS

New book captures the vitality, excitement and challenges of the present era.

Schools + Politics + Money = Turmoil, Change, Uncertainty

by Edward A. Parish

The Changing Politics of School Finance, edited by Nelda Cambron-McCabe and Allan Odden. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1982. 289 pp.

The Changing Politics of School Finance, the 1982 yearbook of the American Education Finance Association, is written at the halfway mark of Reagan's four-year administration. It analyzes the political and financial patterns of education in the past and provides a framework for predicting the future. Nelda Cambron-McCabe and Allan Odden, the editors, have gathered able writers with cogent perspectives on the many facets of finance politics. Unlike many collections which have several writers, this volume suffers little discontinuity. The book is arranged logically and is cohesive and integrated.

The first chapter, by Laurence Iannacone, sets a high standard for succeeding chapters. Entitled "Turning Point Election Periods in the Politics of Education," this chapter establishes the tenor for the whole volume. A turning point election period (TPEP) marks a pivotal change in political priorities. This conceptual tool permits one to put the past in perspective and, consequently, to better understand the present. Iannacone envisions a sequential five-step process of change:

1. Voter discontent.
2. An initial "triggering" election.
3. A realignment election.
4. Articulation of a new policy mandate.

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5. A final test election.

TPEPs provide a convenient vehicle for political analysis. These turning points can occur at any level of government. At the federal level, 1984 may mark the "final test election." This TPEP analysis has many implications for the future of school finance. If correct, the 1984 election is a portentous one, either finalizing a significant change or merely indicating continued realignment. This chapter captures the drama of political change. As one reads the succeeding selections, whether about local politics or private schools, each subject lends itself to a continuation of the TPEP analysis.

Many of the chapters begin with historical considerations. Federal aid is traced to the eighteenth century. A review of public aid to private schools starts 150 years ago. The chapter on financing urban schools begins in the 1930s. Despite this reflection on past decades and earlier centuries, the emphasis is on the recent past, the present, and the future. This volume is clearly concerned with where we are, how we got there, and where we may be going in financing education in the United States.

The breadth of the subjects addressed can be captured by a brief statement of some of the more interesting conclusions:

The next two years will decide which federal programs, if any, survive.

Particularly at the state level educators are likely to be more influential in political decisions about education.

School finance reform may be the result of shifting revenue and expenditures, not the cause.

Future tax and expenditure limitation amendments are likely to be few in number and moderate in effect.

Private schools will gain as a result of the paradox of increased government aid and decreased government entanglement.

Urban schools will suffer, receiving less federal aid, but required to meet more stringent minimum standards imposed by the state.

Retrenchment is inevitable but proper managerial strategies can deal effectively with the social and political realities of contraction.

These conclusions hint at the scope of **The Changing Politics of School Finance**. The sole exception to the volume's cohesiveness is the chapter on courts and finance reform by Tyll van Geel. The format for the rest of the book is to examine the past, analyze the dynamics of current trends, and to make predictions. Van Geel instead poses broad philosophical questions such as, "To what degree do constitutional governments work?" He then sets forth a model which he believes will facilitate predictions regarding change. Van Geel concludes that future models should be reduced to mathematical formulas. His model has its place, but this is not it.

Cambron-McCabe and Odden have captured the vitality, excitement and challenges of the present era. The writers have dealt with important issues clearly and succinctly. The issues are complex, but these scholars have shared incisive perceptions of the major dilemmas of American school finance.