Chapter 7

Education Reform and the Deep State: An Alternate Universe

As the educational manifestation of NCLB permeated the hallways of America's public schools during President Bush's two terms in office, an alternate universe of education reform existed. While America was trying to make sense of federal NCLB policies and many public schools were fighting for their very existence under threats of closure, a vanguard of systemic education reform advocates were busy behind the curtain of the Deep State, wielding the levers that would carry the country further down the path to the Common Core State Standards. Within this universe, individuals and groups whose allegiance to a corporate-driven free market approach to reform continued to marshal their ideas in order to finally dominate America's education landscape. For them, NCLB was a profound victory providing a bridge to their final destination. The federal government had successfully imposed on America's public schools a system in which high-stakes standardized tests became the currency to measure the worth of a school, the teachers within the school, and the students enrolled in the school.

What was needed, however, was a common standardized measurement across the 50 United States. Without a common assessment, it was impossible to determine if, for example, schools in Mississippi were performing at the same level as schools in Connecticut or California. Under NCLB, states were free to choose their own standardized tests and this was clearly not adequate. Once NCLB was in place, systemic education reformers never missed a beat. With the creation of Achieve at the 1996 Palisades Summit, a corporate mechanism was in place to continue the work of carving out the path to the Common Core.

NCLB created a framework for strengthening the curricular grip on elementary schools. The next step was to find a way to tighten the reins at the secondary level. The American Diploma Project (ADP) would serve as the road map for accomplishing what NCLB could not accomplish—a free market corporate K-12 education feeding ground and the ability to put into place common standardized assessments.

THE WELLSPRING OF CCSS: THE AMERICAN DIPLOMA PROJECT

According to the Achieve website, four organizations were instrumental in launching the American Diploma Project: Achieve, the Education Trust, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and the National Alliance of Business (NAB), although the NAB soon dropped out of the project. The lead writer and often called the chief architect of the ADP was Susan Pimentel, a person who will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 8 as instrumental in creating the CCSS.[1] The stated goal of the ADP was "to help states prepare all students for success." According to Achieve, the ADP was launched in 2001, and between that year and 2004, the project "commissioned leading economists to examine labor market projections for the most promising jobs" in order to "pinpoint the academic knowledge and skills required for success in those occupations." Achieve then surveyed officials from 22 occupations, ranging from manufacturing to financial services, about the skills they believed were most useful for their employees to bring to the job. Following those conversations, Achieve worked "closely with K-12, postsecondary and business leaders" in five partner states "to identify the English and mathematics knowledge and skills needed for success in both college and work."[2] The five partner states were Indiana, Massachusetts, Kentucky, Nevada, and Texas. From 2002 to 2004, an Achieve team worked within states to develop "college and workplace benchmarks" they claimed would "offer the solid foundation upon which states can raise academic expectations and that have currency beyond 12th grade."[3]

The end result of the ADP team working within these states was a report titled "Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts." Achieve announced its publication in December 2004.[4] As an important aside that helps one understand the origins of the CCSS, that same month a report by the American Council of Education (ACE) entitled "The School-to- College Transition: Challenges and Prospects" was published. According to ACE, the report was "generously supported" by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The report began with the following declaration: "Within the U.S. elementary and secondary schools, the pathway to college access is marked by vast disparities in preparation for, knowledge of, and attitude toward college."[5] The report was particularly concerned about "inequitable conditions in K-12 education for low socioeconomic and racial and ethnic groups."[6] Two of the major conclusions of the ACE report were that "the barriers to college access are primarily financial and academic" and the greatest need for helping students get a college degree were in rural and urban areas of the United States where poverty was high.[7] Most important, however, to understand the origins of the CCSS, it is important to be aware that while Achieve, the National Governors Association (NGA), and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) were engaged in an effort to systemically reform K-12 education in 2004, so was the Gates foundation.

By 2008, one year before the final push to the creation of CCSS, Gates would infuse hundreds of millions of dollars into the CCSS initiative that would then be channeled into the coffers of diverse ideological and political groups such as the more conservative ALEC, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the more liberal Center for American Progress. Gates also funneled money to the NEA and the AFT, America's two largest teachers' unions, enticing them to join the CCSS crusade. And very importantly, as Lyndsey Layton would point out in 2014, Gates's systemic education reform dollars would also influence President Obama, "whose new administration was populated by former Gates staffers and associates."[8]

Achieve freely and proudly acknowledges that the 2004 "Ready or Not" report led to the CCSS. For example, Achieve proclaims that this "groundbreaking report—the result of over two years of research—identifies a common core of English and mathematics academic knowledge and skills, or 'benchmarks,' that American high school graduates need for success in college and the workforce."[9]

According to the "Ready or Not" report, "too many young Americans [were] graduating from high school without the skills and knowledge they need to succeed,"[10] a conclusion based on the following findings:

- More than 70 percent of high school graduates decide to go on to college, and 28 percent of these graduates need remedial help in college.
- Most college students never attain a degree.
- Most high school graduates lack basic skills in grammar, spelling, writing, and basic math.

- Most workers question the preparation that high schools provide, and these same workers rate literacy and critical thinking as much more important than job-specific or computer skills.

Based on Achieve's finding that 70 percent of high school grads go on to college and 28 percent require remedial work, it is not clear what the probability of college success for the other 30 percent that decided not to go on to college would have been. Achieve seems to want us to infer that the entire 30 percent did not go on to college because they were not properly prepared. However, an inference like this is problematic. Perhaps in some cases a student's decision not to attend college after graduating from high school was unrelated to their academic abilities at all. Many factors influence a student's decision about college attendance, including financial constraints, a desire to first serve in the military or pursue a trade or vocation, or simply a desire to postpone college for a number of reasons that may not relate to academic preparedness. As discussed in chapter 2, there was a time when some education reformers and scholars felt that only 15 to 20 percent of high school graduates had the ability to go on to college, specifically those with an IQ of 110 or higher. Nevertheless, the American system of education should be lauded for expanding opportunities for citizens to engage in postsecondary educational experiences. Community colleges and four-year institutions with open enrollment policies provide opportunities for many more citizens to earn a college diploma, unfettered by notions of who is, or is not, capable of engaging in college-level work.

Using Achieve's statistics (28 percent of the 70 percent of high school students deciding to go to college need remedial courses) actually provides a more positive picture than Achieve seems to acknowledge. For example, according to Achieve, 72 percent of all students enrolling in college did *not* need remedial courses. Looking a little closer at these percentages, even if the "entire" 30 percent of students who did not go on to college would have needed remedial work, which is highly unlikely, that still means that a little over half of "all" high school graduates were prepared to go on to some type of higher education institution. Although we need to constantly improve high schools to better meet the needs of all students, the fact that our high schools in 2004 produced as many students as they did that were capable of attaining a college degree with no remediation (according to Achieve's data) is actually quite impressive, given the fact that the United States has one of the highest poverty rates among countries that are considered to have "advanced economies."

In 2004, for example, approximately 18 percent of America's children were living in poverty after having hit a low of 12.1 percent in 2000. By 2012, according to UNICEF, the United States had 23.1 percent of its children living in poverty and ranking 34 out of 35 in countries identified as economically advanced.[11] Even in 2004, with poverty rates among children rising at a blistering rate, producing a little over 50 percent of all high school students prepared for college seems to require at least some accolades instead of complete condemnation.

Although most college students never attain a college degree, college costs, life experiences, and personal dispositions are important factors that impact college completion. Achieve infers that the reason college students do not complete their degree is because of a poor high school education. However, that inference does not accurately portray the realities of college life. For many students, the financial burden of postsecondary education for themselves and their families interrupts their ability to get an advanced degree. This, combined with other factors unrelated to academics must be considered when discussing the number of students who leave college before completion. As an interesting aside, in Finland, now often considered the personification of educational success, college tuition is free. Therefore, given the financial advantage of students in Finland, it can be reasonably inferred that if the United States followed Finland's example then college completion rates would skyrocket.

If, as noted above, a little over 50 percent of all high school graduates have the skills to be successful in college according the Achieve's statistics, then it is incorrect to proclaim that "most" high school graduates lack basic skills. It can be argued that "too many" students do lack these skills. However, this probably says more about certain high schools in certain areas of the United States rather than being an indictment of all high schools and, therefore, does not point to the need for total systemic education reform.

According to Achieve, most workers question the preparation that high schools provide and these same workers rate literacy and critical thinking as much more important than job-specific or computer skills. This makes one wonder if these workers were talking about specific literacy skills that relate to their current careers such as reading various technical manuals, reading directions for putting something together, or reading blueprints for a project or the literacy and critical thinking skills that these workers thought they could and should have gotten by reading, writing, and talking about works such as *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the historical writings of Daniel Boorstin, or *The*

Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka, which the ADP creators posited was a way to address worker literacy and critical-thinking concerns and the jobs they eventually had after high school.[12] However, teachers have always tried to explain to students how what they studied in high school would apply to their lives after high school. For some students these teachers were successful, while for others they were not for a number of reasons, including the vocational goals a student aspired to achieve that had little to do with a traditional college prep curriculum.

The final outcome of the 2004 report "Ready or Not" was based on a belief that the curricular standards that resulted from NCLB legislation were not enough. Instead, what was needed were national standards. ADP research declared that it had found "an important convergence around the core knowledge and skills that both colleges and employers—within and beyond ADP states—require." What was needed was a "high school diploma" that represented "common currency nationwide."[13] In other words, a national set of standards measured by a national test that ultimately measured a national curriculum was needed that somehow had to circumvent the fact that the federal government could not by law mandate a national curriculum. This was something that by 2014 both conservatives on the right and liberals on the left would fear.[14] A back door approach was therefore needed by Achieve, the Education Trust, and the conservative Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, and all their corporate allies, in order to negotiate these educationally treacherous federal waters. So what first needed to happen, after laying the curricular foundation that would somehow control the nation's public schools, was to create the illusion that any national curricular reform initiative would come from the states. In this way the curricular standards and subject matter that manifested these standards would not be viewed as a top-down federal approach. Instead, it could be rationalized as a bottom-up state approach.

This approach would then fit nicely into a story that went like this: If governors and states bought into these standards and the curriculum that was best able to meet these standards, then by extension the common standards and curricular exemplars would come from states that were legally responsible for public schools. This approach was, in fact, a brilliant maneuver, especially if all of these states and groups associated with this report could at the same time avoid the legalities of the ESEA. Furthermore, "Ready or Not" also declared that there was a need to "back-map standards to create a coherent, focused, grade-by-grade progression from kindergarten through high school graduation." The report explained that "high school graduation is

the culmination of preparation that begins in the elementary grades. Therefore, the standards set for each grade must exhibit a clear progression of content and skills through high school completion. Unless all students are regularly exposed to a challenging curriculum in elementary and middle schools, they will forever be playing catch-up."[15] The 2004 report, in reality, began a backdoor approach using the states to create a national curriculum. For example, if all states jumped onboard the curricular ideas reflected in 2004 report, the creators of this report explained that this would lead to "creating a default curriculum for all students" something that the federal DOE was not able to create by law.[16]

The curricular results of the ADP project outlined in "Ready or Not" can now be clearly seen as a forerunner to the CCSS and were already in place and ready to go when Achieve's 2005 Education Summit convened. Many would argue, however, that there was little that was democratic about its creation and very importantly its acceptance. Arguably, this is why the only better title that could have been used for the report is "Ready or Not—Here We Come!" In other words, Achieve's 2005 summit was a mere formality in that the curricular menu was already being formulated, and all that was needed was for gubernatorial and corporate CEOs to begin taking part in the eventual feast. By the time the 2005 Education Summit took place, 13 states had already joined the ADP to form a coalition. Over the next several years the ADP Network would snowball.

ACHIEVE

As we have seen in chapter 5, Achieve is a legal corporation, administered by a board of six governors and six corporate leaders, created as a result of recommendations for education reform that were made during the 1996 Palisades conference of corporate and gubernatorial CEOs. The officials at Achieve describe their corporation as an "independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit education reform organization dedicated to working with states to raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability." When created, as Vinovskis explains, Achieve's goal was to "collect and disseminate standards and assessments information." Vinovskis further explains that Achieve helped "states to evaluate and improve their academic standards and assessments; creating a national standards and assessment clearinghouse; and working with the public and the business community to stress the importance of high standards and challenging assessments."[17]

Today, Achieve's website reflects the organization's long tentacles into all areas of school reform and its mission of providing a clearinghouse to help private companies sell their educational wares to schools. It seems that Achieve is the corporate education reform world's Walmart. For example, if one visits the Achieve website one will come upon the following: "Click here to visit Future Ready Projects—Achieve's one-stop advocacy resource center, designed to provide state and local college- and career-ready stakeholders with the information, strategies, messages, and tools needed to effectively make the case for the college- and career-ready agenda in their states."[18]

Even at the outset of its creation, Achieve was so powerful and influential that it was able to host the second gubernatorial and corporate CEO summit in 1999 (the 1999 National Education Summit); a third in October 2001 (the 2001 National Education Summit)—five short weeks after the 9/11 attacks; and a fourth in February 2005 (the National Education Summit on High Schools). The 2001 and 2005 education summits were particularly instrumental in creating the path to the Common Core State Standards and, therefore, require closer examination.

ACHIEVE'S 2001 NATIONAL EDUCATION SUMMIT

The 2001 National Education Summit sponsored by Achieve was cochaired by John Engler, Republican governor of Michigan, and Louis V. Gerstner, chairman and CEO of the IBM Corporation. Although only 15 governors attended the 2001 summit as a result of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington DC, it is interesting that the following statement preceded the final report of the 2001 summit:

> The governors, corporate leaders and educators who organized this meeting extend their deepest sympathies to those who lost loved ones in the terrorist assaults of September 11. Events of that day have profoundly affected every American. The people of the United States can draw on great reservoirs of patriotism, decency, courage and resilience as they respond to this unpardonable tragedy. The participants in this meeting, united in the belief that healthy public schools are the foundation of our democracy, dedicate this Summit to the task of building a stronger America.[19]

Of course, it should not surprise anyone that America's public schools would once again be connected to America's larger challenges, as well as its security, within the global community. Somehow corporate and

gubernatorial CEOS, undoubtedly sincere in their empathy to those who suffered as a result of the attack, had now connected America's public schools to this terrorist attack, in the process making a case that public schools were an essential defense against future terrorist attacks. What was the role of American public schools in "building a stronger America" and preventing further terrorist attacks? According the Achieve, "The 2001 Summit focused on helping states address two key challenges: (1) increasing the capacity of teachers and schools to meet higher standards and (2) expanding testing and accountability systems to provide better data and stronger incentives for high student achievement."[20] The 2001 summit clearly indicates that the path to the CCSS was in the process of being paved. For example, these challenges needed to be overcome because, according to Achieve and gubernatorial and corporate CEOs, K-12 public schools were failing and the only solution was systemic education reform. In particular, K-12 public schools had created poorly educated workers and students who were not college and career ready. According to Achieve, its research had found that K-12 graduates did not have the reading, writing, speaking, and mathematical skills to be good workers and college students.[21]

What the 2001 summit also included were 21 education technology demonstrations from companies that praised their technology packages as a means to help ultimately solve all the problems in education America was facing. According to the corporate and gubernatorial CEOS, the goal of these demonstrations was to "showcase innovative education technology programs, prototypes and products that seek to help improve student achievement."[22]

In hindsight, by 2001, clearly all of these tech companies were poised to take advantage of a new education industry in which potentially hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars could become ripe for the pickings. What is now also clear was that these 21 "technology programs, prototypes, and products" heralded a huge technological cottage industry that would increasingly impact how schools needed to be run. Therefore, it is no wonder that, over the years, schools would be increasingly deluged with wave after wave of "ed tech" salespeople who would line up at the office doors of school administrators, wanting easy access to schools and school districts in order to hold out hope that if their products were purchased they would have a positive effect on a school's test scores.[23] Most important, the 2001 National Education Summit would culminate in the announcement of the creation of the ADP. At the very same time, Washington DC and the country were dealing with the anthrax terror threat and

before legislators would resume negotiations before passing NCLB legislation, Achieve, operating within the Deep State, was undeterred, already laying the ground work for the next phase in systemic education reform. Even before NCLB became the federal law of the land, Achieve was immersed in the process of creating a set of national standards, which would later become the CCSS.

ACHIEVE'S 2005 NATIONAL EDUCATION SUMMIT ON HIGH SCHOOLS

The 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools was sponsored by the NGA and Achieve in partnership with the Business Roundtable, the James B. Hunt Institute, and the Education Commission of the States (ECS). As we have seen, the BRT had been deeply immersed in systemic education reform since the 1980s. Established in 2001, by 2002, the Hunt Institute had begun tutoring governors on education reform and to this day is deeply involved in facilitating the CCSS and its educational ramifications.[24] By 2012, the ECS would be working closely with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as well as being engaged in tracking the progress of states in the development and implementation of Common Core strategies and policies.[25] The 2005 summit specifically focused on high schools just like *ANAR* had done 22 years earlier.

By 2005, 13 states had already formed an ADP coalition network and were encouraging other states to join. According to Achieve, this network was designed "to make college and career readiness a priority in the states." Again, Achieve also does not shirk from acknowledging that their concept of education reform could have curricular consequences on a national level. For example, in their own words, "Achieve is proud to be the leading voice for the college and career ready agenda, and has helped transform the concept of 'college and career readiness for all students' from a radical proposal into a national agenda."[26]

By 2005, it seems the education technology tsunami was also now about to swallow America's education landscape. And no better indicator of this was when Bill Gates, arguably the greatest of all technology superstars, was asked to give the opening address at the summit. In his speech, Gates declared, "Too many high school students drop out before earning a diploma, and too many of those who graduate are unprepared for the realities of the 21st century economy. This failure of our high school system has dire consequences for our economy, but even more important, it is simply wrong." Gates

rightfully worried that underprivileged students were not getting the education they deserved, but, on the other hand, Gates also acknowledged that students in public schools within wealthier neighborhoods were getting an excellent education. He then explained that while his foundation was advancing equity in foreign lands by focusing on health issues, what he decided his foundation needed to focus on in America to advance equity was education.[27]

Gates went on to proclaim that American high schools were generally failing and are "obsolete." He explained, "By obsolete, I mean that our high schools—even when they're working exactly as designed—cannot teach our kids what they need to know today." Oddly enough, he then stated, "Let's be clear. Thanks to dedicated teachers and principals around the country, the best-educated kids in the United States are the best-educated kids in the world. We should be proud of that. But only a fraction of our kids are getting the best education." Gates also claimed that while teachers in wealthier districts were doing a good job, in poorer underprivileged districts teachers either felt that their students "cannot learn" or "they are not worth teaching."[28]

Gates then warned that India and China were producing more college graduates and were increasing their share of college graduates worldwide. "The percentage of a population with a college degree is important," Gates explained, "but so are sheer numbers. In 2001, India graduated almost a million more students from college than the United States did. China graduates twice as many students with bachelor's degrees as the United States, and they have six times as many graduates majoring in engineering." According to Gates, this was threatening the security of the United States, but then he contended that in a place like Kansas City great progress was being made in high school performance because of recent innovative educational approaches. Gates explained that the "Kansas City public school district, where 79 percent of students are minorities and 74 percent live below the poverty line, was struggling with high dropout rates and low test scores when it adopted the school-reform model called First Things First in 1996. This included setting high academic standards for all students, reducing teacher-student ratios, and giving teachers and administrators the responsibility to improve student performance and the resources they needed to do it. The district's graduation rate has climbed more than 30 percentage points."[29]

Gates's assertions, however, require further analysis. First, Gates never seemed to somehow bring himself to declare that America should make poverty, healthcare problems, high-crime unsafe neighborhoods, and neighborhoods with no jobs obsolete! Instead, it

seems these problems could be overcome and eliminated by simply systemically reforming public schools. Gates also never mentioned the positive and complex social and economic realities in wealthier school districts that helped them produce excellent students, who, according to Gates, were "the best students in the world." According to Gates, it seems as though educational success in those wealthier schools was because teachers in those schools simply thought that their students could learn and were worth teaching, while educational failure in high-poverty schools within neighborhoods with numerous social and economic challenges was because teachers in those schools thought their students could not learn and were not worth teaching.

As far as higher education is concerned, even though Gates might have been correct when he claimed that China and India were producing more college graduates by 2005, we can simply look at realities then and now regarding higher education in these countries that were and still are inconvenient truths that Gates seemed to ignore, or perhaps just did not consider. So how were American universities doing in 2005, the year Gates made his dramatic claims about higher education in the United States when comparing their productivity to China and India? In 2005, according to the researchers at The Center for World-Class Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the United States had 53 of the top 100 universities in the world! China and India had none, however.[30]

Six years later in 2011, the *Wall Street Journal* would do an exposé on the state of India's higher education system. What the newspaper found was a system that was producing large numbers of graduates who were just not properly prepared. Corruption was rampant, standards were low, and students could pay someone to take final exams for them. Unemployment was high among India's college graduates and one employer in India bemoaned the fact that graduates lacked necessary skills.[31] Furthermore, in 2013–14, according to the United Kingdom's Times Higher Education University (THEU) findings, 30 of the top 50 institutions of higher education in the world were in the United States. Out of the top 100, 45 were in the United States, and, out of the top 200, 76 were from the United States.[32] This dominance in higher education was coming from a country with only 4.4 percent of the world's population in 2012, but with 38 percent of the top 200 universities in the world. China, on the other hand, with a 19 percent share of the world's population, had only one institution in the top 200 universities, and India, with an 18 percent share of the world's population, had no universities in the top 200. In 2013, according to the researchers at The Center for World-Class Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the United States had eight of the top ten universities for science, six out of ten for math, eight out of ten for physics, seven out of ten for chemistry, ten out of ten for computers, and ten out of ten for engineering.[33]

As far as Kansas City's schools are concerned, Gates's proclamations of success were clearly premature. According to Bob Schaefer of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, after ten years of NCLB goals and other supposedly innovative approaches to education like the one Gates lauded in 2005, the ACT scores among minority students indicated that they were not making educational progress. Schaefer observed, "Significant gaps remain between affluent children and their economically disadvantaged peers. Likewise, white and Asian students widened the difference between them and black and Hispanic students."[34] So with all of the educational innovations that were designed to close the achievement gap among disadvantaged groups of students, clearly, in Kansas City, its public schools alone could not solve the education challenges facing some minority groups. Larger social and economic factors needed to be overcome, factors that Gates seemed to be ignoring in his crusade to systemically reform America's public schools, when high-stakes testing became the ultimate indicator of school success.

Nevertheless, the ADP was ready to go, and its supporters would find an important road grader that would smooth America's path to the CCSS. A grand education project like the ADP, however, was not simply the result of efforts by Achieve alone. Two other groups, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the Education Trust, took part in this education reform project and its curricular ramifications that would seek to dominate America's national education landscape.

THE FORDHAM FOUNDATION

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation was created in 1959 as an organization supporting a range of philanthropic causes in Dayton, Ohio.[35] The foundation is named after industrialist Thomas B. Fordham and was created by his widow, Thelma. Its recent past president, Chester Finn, has close family ties with the Fordham family. His grandfather had been Thomas Fordham's attorney and his grandparents and parents were close friends of Thelma Fordham Pruett after her husband's death in 1945. It was not until the death of Thelma Fordham Pruett in 1995, and Chester Finn's appointment as its president, that the Fordham Foundation devoted its energies and funds to education reform. Finn explains, "because Thelma gave no clear guidance"

regarding how to spend the foundation's money, the foundation board decided that they "had a free hand and soon resolved to devote this enterprise to reforming K-12 education, both nationally and in the Dayton (Ohio) area." The foundation soon adopted "the credo of the Educational Excellence Network," words that harkened back to *ANAR*. Finn, however, argues that in spite of critics at the time, the organization was not conservative, although by quickly entering into agreements with the Hudson and Manhattan Institutes this claim can be taken with a grain of salt.[36]

By 2001, the foundation jumped on board the systemic education reform bandwagon with Achieve and the Education Trust to create the ADP and its eventual report "Ready or Not." By 2002, the Fordham Foundation formed the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which has since become the "public face" of the foundation and also a leading conservative "think tank" in the education arena.

Chester Finn has had a diverse career, primarily focusing on education reform in the United States. For example, he is a former professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, is a former assistant secretary of education during the Reagan years of 1985–88, has written numerous articles and books about education, is associated with the conservative Hudson and Hoover Institutes, and holds a master of arts in teaching (MAT) degree in social studies and an EdD in education policy from Harvard. In 1991, David Kearns called Finn "one of America's most thoughtful and responsible education writers." That year, Finn, who, like many conservatives, believed America was in a state of moral and educational decay, was already calling for reforming America's public school curriculum arguing that "universal mastery of common core is what will hold us together as Americans, equalize our opportunities for happiness and prosperity, and revitalize the nation's civic, economic, and cultural life."

More than 25 years before the official starting date of the CCSS, Finn explained that one of the hardest things that needed to be overcome in systemically reforming America's public schools was not only making the nation's school curriculum more rigorous, but also defining what was meant by "competency over challenging subject matter." He then went on to say, while states can no longer simply rely on testing minimum competencies among students, "we also want our standards to be achievable by essentially all our young people, provided they work hard enough and long enough at it and then we give them enough instructional assistance."[37] According to Finn, oddly enough, this meant that on the one hand, high standards were needed that would challenge those students identified as gifted, say with an IQ

of 130 or more. On the other hand, this also meant that the "high" standards and resulting rigorous curriculum had to be low enough so that they could be "essentially achievable" by other students whose academic abilities were on the other end of the education spectrum.

In his autobiography, *Troublemaker: A Personal History of School Reform Since Sputnik*, Finn describes his various roles in education: "my jobs have cycled between 'inside-action-participant' and 'outside-analyst–writer'. . . . I crave both the excitement of doing and running things, and the intellectual stimulus of trying to make sense of them. . . . I need to write books, articles, op-eds, testimony—but I also yearn for direct experience."[38] Finn's yearning for "direct experience" however, did not seem to be the kind that lends itself well to personally becoming a public school teacher. Writing about his teaching experience at Newton High School during the 1965–66 school year, Finn admits "I wasn't much good at it." He rationalized his failure by explaining that he was only 21 at the time and all his students were seniors and "mostly from the wrong side of the (Newton) tracks." According to Finn, "Newton High School was (and remains) one of America's most esteemed public schools in a predominantly upper-middle class, education-obsessed Boston suburb." Newton was also a "Conant-style comprehensive high school" with courses for bright students, as well as courses for "less able, less motivated, and less fortunate youngsters." Finn explained, "My four classes were part of 'curriculum II,' which by twelfth grade meant that my students were mostly putting in time until they could grab their diplomas and head off to work, army, or the nearby community college. . . . Many of the boys were bigger, and nearly all of them tougher, than I. The girls misbehaved less, but that didn't mean that their minds were focused on the Problems of American Democracy course that I struggled to teach."[39] Finn explained his inadequate performance as a teacher by pointing out that he had no teaching experience, and also claiming that he had no syllabus or textbook. According to Finn, his assigned "master teacher" all but ignored him. He was left to "devise his own curriculum and pedagogy." He lamented that no one "much cared what I taught or if anything, my students learned."[40]

Interestingly, in spite of Finn's lack of teaching ability as a result of his MAT degree versus one that could have been earned through a more traditional teacher education program, by 2010 he would endorse what he considered to be the innovative approach to creating teachers via Teach for America (TFA), a program that requires only a five-week training session in education before a person enters a classroom. This is a program that puts into the teaching field young recent

university graduates with excellent academic records but with little training in education compared with those teachers trained in traditional teacher education programs.[41] Like Finn had been, TFA teachers are very bright young adults but have very little pedagogical training.

Finn's brief lackluster performance as a teacher led him to conclude, "I came to understand that teaching is hard and that being smart and well educated doesn't necessarily mean that one will be effective at it. . . . I also learned vividly that even the most acclaimed schools have 'kids left behind,' youngsters getting an inferior education while their age mates get a good one." Finn further concluded, "The education system that served me well as a student in Dayton just a few years earlier was mistreating these kids in Newton. Someone needed to make more of a fuss about it." Oddly enough he came to this final conclusion: "But my big discovery . . . was that retail work in the classroom was not where I belonged over the long haul. . . . If I were personally going to make a difference in American education—especially to its hoary practices, outdated assumptions, and mixed-bag performance—I would have to find a perch in the wholesale yard!"[42]

Finn's discussion of his teaching experiences at Newton High School is important when considering his role as a systemic education reformer. According to Finn, for many students Newton was doing a great job—which meant that there was no need for systemic reform. Rather, if we believe Finn's story, there was a need to reform one aspect of that school. And although Finn admitted he had gotten a good education in Dayton, at 15 he transferred to the very expensive Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. In spite of Finn's acknowledgment that "teaching is hard" and that there are social, economic, and personal issues that impact the educational lives of students, Finn would go on to use resources provided by the Fordham Foundation to engage in systemic education reform initiatives that ultimately hold teachers accountable for any low test scores in their classrooms. The Fordham Foundation would fully support the ADP and go on to become an active proponent of the CCSS.

THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust (ET) was one of the civil rights organizations Rhodes refers to as "civil rights entrepreneurs." The ET would get on the corporate bandwagon that supported school choice, vouchers, and charter schools, with all the accoutrements of high-stakes testing, in order to raise the academic achievement of minorities. The organization continues to dedicate itself to this approach. While the ET was engaged

in implementing this approach in Milwaukee—an approach that would prove to be unsuccessful—it became deeply involved with Achieve and the Fordham Foundation in the creation of the ADP. The ET supported increased federal involvement in school reform as it wholeheartedly supported NCLB, rationalizing that this approach was the best way to overcome the historic underachievement of disadvantaged groups. However, when the ET threw in with Achieve and the Fordham Foundation, conservatives and corporate education reformers were able, at least to some degree, to argue that this proved that what they were doing had nothing but the best of democratic intentions. When the ET put their name on the ADP, and all of the resulting reports that ended up creating new curricular standards as well as supporting Draconian accountability and assessment measures, for lawmakers this only validated that these education reform efforts covered the entire spectrum of American society. Very importantly, as Rhodes points out, the ET was willing to "jettison their demands for the 'opportunity to learn' standards entirely."[43] In effect, this was an admission on the part of the ET that outside larger social and economic factors could ultimately be overlooked when holding public schools accountable for the success or failure of underachieving populations. In the process, the ET decided, after looking at America's failed efforts at eliminating poverty within communities in which student academic achievement was well below more affluent communities, that it was probably best to ultimately ignore all of the social and economic realities that were essential for those communities to produce education excellence.

This reality is reflected in the ET's fealty to ultimately holding public schools, and only public schools, accountable for student performance that would be measured through high-stakes tests, as well as an undying loyalty to charter schools and school choice that would help dismiss larger social and economic reasons for academic underachievement. By 2011, Adolph Reed seemed to confirm this reality as it relates to systemic education reform, when he stated, "The movement for racial justice has shifted its focus from 'inequality' to 'disparity' neatly evading any critique of structural factors such as inequality."[44] In other words, instead of directly confronting economic and social factors like poverty or segregation that have historically been and remain a root cause that impedes the opportunities and achievement of minority groups, in the case of a civil rights group, such as the ET, it decided to attack the education disparities among minorities, focusing instead on test scores as the referee for closing the achievement gap. In the process, systemic education reformers were easily able to place both the blame and solution regarding the

plight of minority groups squarely on the shoulders of public schools and teachers. While the ET might have been acting with all good intentions when they decided to join the vanguard of systemic education reformers, by letting these reformers off the hook so to speak in addressing larger social and economic issues that have always been part of America's education system, the ET, wittingly or not, lent their civil rights credibility to the corporate assault on dismantling America's institution of public schools.

OUT OF MANY ONE

By 2008, ADP network membership had grown to 30 states. Earlier in November 2007, a CCSSO policy forum had addressed the need for one set of shared academic standards. In July 2008, the Achieve report "Out of Many, One: Toward Rigorous, Common Core Standards from the Ground Up" was published basically reiterating what had been said in the 2004 report "Ready or Not," but with an important addition. Now more specific high school benchmarks had been created by the ADP members. These benchmarks, as the report explicitly stated, were designed to help "states align their standards to college and career readiness."[45] By the time this report was created, 16 states had already begun the process of adopting these standards and benchmarks. Achieve and its allies discussed "the key implications of this emerging common core," triumphantly declaring, "The ADP Core is the Common Core. . . . The ADP Core has become the 'common core' as a byproduct of the alignment work in each of the states."[46]

There still was, however, a little matter of the ESEA and the fact that it was quite literally illegal to mandate a national curriculum, which is why the report stated that "while state standards from these [participating] states share a common core, they are not identical." What we therefore see developing was the mantra that states could always choose what they would do. No one, at this point was mandating that any state choose this curricular path. Achieve overtly stated the implications of their actions. "A state led movement for common core standards is feasible" they declared, and it took "a sustained coordinated effort to develop college—and career-ready standards."[47]

Achieve's role in systemic K-12 education reform was now clear. The 2008 "Out of Many" report declared the need for K-8 standards to go along with ADP high school standards. In an interesting use of language, seemingly to ensure the resulting K-12 standards would be aligned with the ADP standards and that the process would not be sidetracked by experts in K-12 education, the ADP creators made this statement: "The K-12 system can't do it alone [i.e. creating these standards]; the postsecondary and business communities must be deeply involved in order to make sure that the resulting standards reflect their expectations and are accepted by them. . . . States must now follow through and review and revise, as necessary, their K-8 standards to create a focused, clear, and rigorous set of grade-by-grade standards that provide a clear progression toward high school."[48] By 2008, Achieve's game plan was already in place and available for all to see, as it proclaimed, "Achieve is prepared to work with states collectively on this task, with the expectation that doing so will help further reinforce the emerging core of K-12 set standards in English and mathematics."[49] Within this eventual process, Achieve would hand pick a select writing team in order to make sure that those who were experts in K-8 education, let alone K-12 education, would not stand in the way of the curricular goals of Achieve and its allies.

According to the NGA, following the release of the report "Out of Many One," "the NGA Center and CCSSO convened governor's advisors and chief state school officers to gauge interest in developing a set of common, internationally benchmarked academic standards. Fifty-one states and U.S. territories signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) committing them to participate in the development process."[50] This meeting, however, was nothing more than mere formality since it was highly unlikely the NGA and CCSSO would have abandoned their education reform course of action that had been developing since 1989. But what is most problematic is that states seemed to feel the need to sign a MOU committing to these standards. One needs to consider, however, that if these standards were really state led, then there was no need to have states make a written commitment to the standards. Was this MOU designed to simply show national unity regarding these standards in order to give them more credibility among all citizens? Or was the purpose of a MOU to signify to the federal government and the DOE that all states were fellow travelers along the path to the CCSS? As we will see in the next chapter, in order to get federal Race to the Top (RTTT) money, states would be enticed to adopt the untested CCSS.

BENCHMARKING FOR SUCCESS: ENSURING U.S. STUDENTS RECEIVE A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION

In December 2008, during the second greatest recession in America's history caused in the main by unscrupulous hedge fund managers and questionable banking practices, another report was issued by Achieve,

the NGA, and the CCSSO. The preparation of this published report, entitled "Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education," was "generously supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the GE Foundation."[51] Significantly, Susan Pimentel, who was the architect of the ADP and would be considered a lead writer of the CCSS, was also closely connected to the GE Foundation. An "International Benchmarking Advisory Board" was formed by the NGA, CCSSO, and Achieve to provide these "three organizations with valuable insights and help frame this bipartisan Call to Action." The group was made up of what was called "national, state, and local policy leaders."[52] The only person, however, who could have possibly been called a "local" policy leader was Beverly L. Hall, who was the superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, a school district that was eventually scandalized with cheating on standardized tests during her tenure as superintendent.

The three cochairs of the advisory board were Sonny Perdue, Republican governor from Georgia; Janet Napolitano, Democratic governor from Arizona; and Craig R. Barnett, chairman of the board for the Intel Corporation. There were also some individuals representing already familiar groups supporting systemic reform such as Steven Baltimore, CEO of the Microsoft Corporation; Chester Finn, president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute; James B. Hunt, chairman of the Hunt Institute; Kate Haycock, president of the ET; Janet Murguia, president and CEO of the National Council of La Raza; and Richard Riley, senior partner with EducationCounsel LLC, and the former U.S. secretary of education during the Clinton administration. The report relied a great deal on the insights regarding international education of Sir Michael Barber who would eventually become chief education strategist for the Pearson Corporation and a staunch supporter of the creation of the CCSS.[53] We will see in the coming chapters that Pearson will influence all aspects of the CCSS once in place, including the creation of high-stakes tests and in the process make huge profits.

The report was designed to further the case for the implementation of the CCSS by excoriating K-12 public schools for what the report's supporters believed was the abysmal performance of public schools within the international education arena. The report would also act as the final springboard that would help launch the CCSS. Tests associated with the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessments (PISA) were used to make the case for complete systemic reform in America's K-12 public schools. The report claimed that "the U.S. is rapidly losing its historic edge in educational attainment," although,

as we have seen, this was an argument being made for at least the last 60 or 70 years. For many decades critics of America's system of public education had been claiming public educational failure both nationally and internationally. And even though this 2008 report finally admitted that the 1983 report "*A Nation at Risk* erred in linking the recession of the early 1980s to educational stagnation," the 2008 report proclaimed that "improving education is critical to America's economic competitiveness"[54] Compared to the rest of the world, the report continued the now historical claim that America's K-12 public schools were supposedly not doing the job that was needed to give the United States the competitive edge it needed to remain the world's economic power. In particular, the report stated that "education systems in the United States tend to give disadvantaged and low-achieving students a watered down curriculum and place them in larger classes taught by less qualified teachers" which the report claimed was "exactly the opposite of the educational practices of high-performing districts."[55]

The report, however, was aware of the critics, who to this day understand the profound, debilitating effects of poverty on the lives and educational well-being of students. For this reason the report went out of its way to marginalize the impact of poverty on the educational attainment of children, arguing that the United States really did not have as many children living below the poverty level compared to some other more high-performing countries, and the only reason children living in poverty within the United States did poorly was "because its education system does a particularly poor job supporting its students and equalizing learning outcomes." Furthermore, according to the report, America really did not have any more diversity than did other countries that were performing better. The report rationalized this bizarre and illogical statement by explaining the fact that Singapore, with high PISA scores, had "three major ethnic groups" and "three-fourths of Singapore's population is Chinese, but almost a quarter is Malay or Indian." Of course, this is a far cry from the diversity seen in the United States. But what is perhaps even more bizarre and perhaps the height of educational and social chicanery, the report stated, "like the United States, Singapore experienced serious ethnic strife in the 1960s." And making sure that all its bases were covered in its quest to radically change America's entire system of education, the report also proclaimed that even America's better educated students from wealthier communities were doing poorly. So in reality, no one in the United States was getting a good education, which was why America needed new common core standards internationally benchmarked.[56]

What is perhaps the most troubling part of the December 2008 report is that it argued that somehow America's education system was so poor that pharmaceutical companies "such as Merck, Eli Lilly, and Johnson and Johnson [were] relying on India and China not only for manufacturing and clinical trials, but also for advanced research and development. As a result, scientists in those countries [were] rapidly increasing their ability to innovate and create their own intellectual property; the global share of pharmaceutical patent applications originating in India and China increased fourfold from 1995 to 2006."[57] It seems that in spite of the fact that India and China did not have generally agreed upon world-class universities, as we have already seen, somehow they were good enough for the pharmaceutical companies to use them to create drugs and impact the health and well-being of Americans.

Of course, another question that needs to be asked is: "Were these countries really producing better scientists or were they countries that produced a cheaper work force?" It also seems that for pharmaceutical companies it was a positive when India and China made their populations, many of whom were poor and illiterate, open to increased clinical trials! Of course, it can be easily argued that one reason this was appealing to the pharmaceutical companies was because India and China, for example, did not have the governmental policies in place designed to protect its citizens.[58] And in spite of China's supposedly vaunted scientific expertise, as the *China Daily/U.S.A* would report in 2014, "many Chinese companies [involved in the pharmaceutical industry] do research in American laboratories."[59] But most troubling of all is that even though China in 2014 would be relying on the expertise of American scientists to create pharmaceuticals, John P. Clark, Pfizer's chief security officer, would warn, "China is the source of some of the largest counterfeit manufacturing operations that we find globally."[60]

Nevertheless, in 2008 for all of the above reasons and more, Achieve, the NGA, and the CCSSO called for a course of action that consisted of the following five components:

1. Upgrade state standards by adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards for math and language arts for grades K-12.
2. Leverage states' collective influence to ensure that textbooks, digital media, **curricula** [emphasis added], and assessments are aligned to internationally benchmarked standards.

3. Revise state policies for recruiting, preparing, developing, and supporting teachers and school leaders to reflect human capital practices of top performing nations and states around the world.
4. Hold schools and systems accountable through monitoring, interventions, and support to ensure consistently high performance, drawing upon international best practices.
5. Measure state-led education performance globally by examining student achievement and attainment in an international context to ensure that, over time, students are receiving what they need to compete in the 21st century economy.[61]

The CCSS website proclaims, "The state-led effort to develop the Common Core State Standards was launched in 2009 by state leaders, including governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, two territories and the District of Columbia, through their membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). State school chiefs and governors recognized the value of consistent, real-world learning goals and launched this effort to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life."[62] On paper this might be considered the official gunshot that started the CCSS and America's education race to the top. However, the official 2009 launch now can be clearly seen as a mere formality. Since at least 2001, and it might well be argued even before that year, an elaborate strategy had been employed to actually get what corporate and gubernatorial CEOs wanted all along. Something that a federal policy like NCLB, which was actually a federally reauthorized ESEA, could never give them—a nationally agreed upon set of Common Core State Standards and common assessments. But still, the federal government and the DOE needed to steer clear of any direct involvement that might infer any illegal trespass into creating a national curriculum. This was strictly forbidden by law. To make sure that all states, and by extension, all public schools within those states were on board the Common Core State Standards express, a slick and innovative approach was needed. What was needed was a carrot and stick approach that avoided federal education reform legalities but would also ensure that the goals of Achieve and its allies would be realized. Stepping up to this challenge would be the Obama administration and its newly appointed Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, with his marching orders already clearly in place.