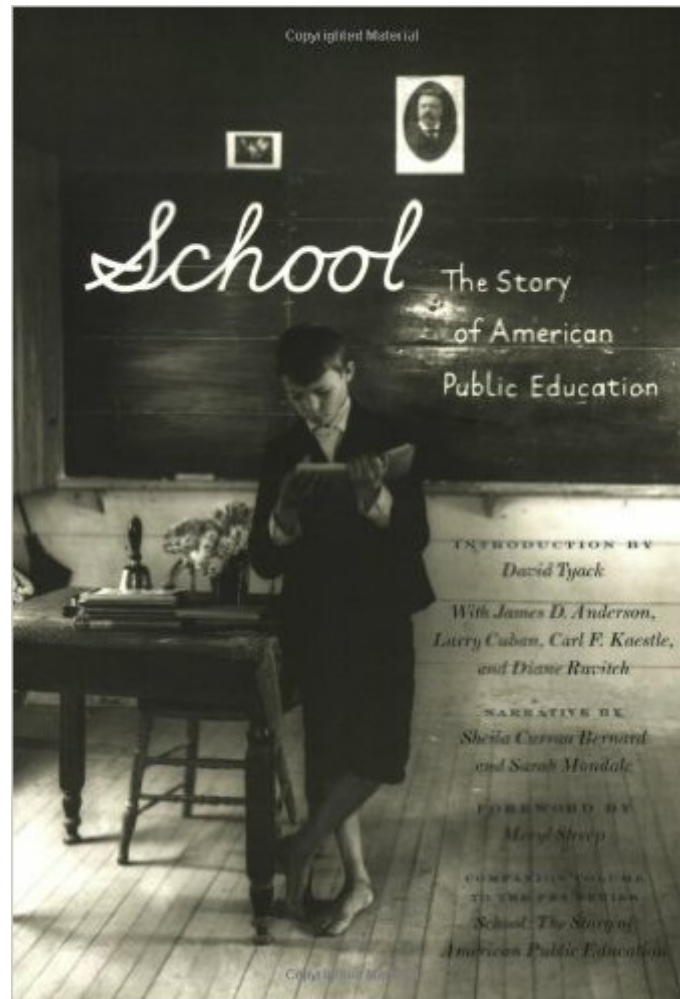


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# School: The Story Of American Public Education



## Synopsis

Esteemed historians of education David Tyack, Carl Kaestle, Diane Ravitch, James Anderson, and Larry Cuban journey through history and across the nation to recapture the idealism of our education pioneers, Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann. We learn how, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, massive immigration, child labor laws, and the explosive growth of cities fueled school attendance and transformed public education, and how in the 1950s public schools became a major battleground in the fight for equality for minorities and women. The debate rages on: Do today's reforms challenge our forebears' notion of a common school for all Americans? Or are they our only recourse today? This lavishly illustrated companion book to the acclaimed PBS documentary, *School*, is essential reading for anyone who cares about public education.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

That a book entitled *School: The Story of American Public Education* is not all things to all people is not surprising. The book is limited in scope to a history of public education in the United States. It says so in the title. It is not a book on home schooling, private schools, schools outside the U.S., a history of people who disagree profoundly with the American Public School System or a broad study of educational methods. The title pretty much sums this up. This book has several strong points: 1) It's written in a succinct prose style. This isn't necessarily a boon to education majors, but it's a good thing for the general public. It's hard to make education sound interesting, and this book does a pretty good job. As a special sidelight, this book will interest thinking people inside the school

system. It may even be picked up by teenagers, those currently most ensconced in the U.S. system of public education.2) It is one of the only books available to non-professionals. It's fairly easy to get information, dates, a rundown of the major players in educational theory/movements, and an idea about what those involved in the educational system thought about their schools at the time. It isn't one stop shopping, but it is a good start.3)The accompanying photographs are marvelous. Nothing illustrates the crowding of the tenement schools, the desperate situation of child laborers in the early part of the 20th century, or the inclusion protests of the 1960's and 1970's quite like the pictures.4) It is possible to read between the lines. Although the book doesn't explicitly link ideas like the push from German Immigrants to get their children out of the "shop" track and into college prep.

On a school day, almost a quarter of the U.S. population is either in a public school or working in an administrative position for a public school. How are we doing with this enormous enterprise? To answer that question, *School* begins with the origins of the free public school in New England cities and takes it into the present experiments to follow the model of major corporations and the marketplace. Along the way, if you are like me, you'll come away more impressed with what has been accomplished. The common themes have been local versus central control over education, honoring diversity versus meeting standards, and liberty versus equality. General progress has occurred in being more inclusive (minorities and women), helping people become assimilated into American culture (especially through literacy and citizenship), and learning talents needed to be a productive member of a more educated society. Part one looks at the Common School from 1770-1900. These were formed in response to the Protestant concept that people needed to be able to read the Bible and interpret it for themselves. At the time of the Revolution, 90 percent of white males and 60 percent of white females could read a little and sign their names.

Massachusetts led the way in making school conditions better under Horace Mann. A top priority of the new republic was to get rid of British texts so that American ideals could be learned. Thomas Jefferson had a visionary plan (which looks pretty inadequate now) that was rejected. By the end of the period, Catholic immigrants felt disrespected by the materials and methods directed by the Protestant elites. Private Catholic schools started to fill the gap.

My second grade daughter is currently involved in a project in which the kids are studying aspects of the past and present to project what the future will be like. My daughter and a friend chose "schools" for their specific project, so I've been helping her find, read, talk through and understand different sources. It's not easy finding relevant information written at a second grade

level, and this book is certainly above her level. But it has provided a nice overview and framework for us to discuss issues for her to think about regarding her future school. For instance, what is the purpose of education? What are the justifications for mandating universal schooling, and should it be mandatory? Who benefits from education? Who has historically participated in education and who should participate? Who has historically been left out of education? How is education funded? Who controls education? And how are those questions all related? This book is essentially a series of essays by different writers covering different periods in American history. Because they are written by different writers, there is some duplication of information, as well as some varying viewpoints. There is brief discussion of the colonial period and the early history of our country, but most of the book covers the period from the founding of the "common schools" as envisioned by Horace Mann up through roughly the time of publication (2002). Most of the essays are fairly light on text with plenty of pictures to supplement the text.

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