

## Chapter 10 Education Policy

**S**ince the end of World War II, education expenditures have represented the fastest growing area of public spending. Across all countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), total funding for educational institutions at all levels rose over the past decade and rose on average by 19 percent between 2000 and 2005 alone (OECD 2008a). By 2005 education spending absorbed on average 6.1 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 13.2 percent of total public expenditures. Education is prominent on national political agendas not only because of its budgetary prominence but also because of its integral role in society. The most basic interests and values of a society are represented in education policy. Often the definition of what constitutes such basic interests and values is a matter of great controversy.

### Common Policy Problems

The most striking feature of the education debate today is the nearly universal and perpetual call for national education reform. Better education has become the prescription for creating individual success, social harmony, and international competitiveness. Political leaders often argue that the solutions to their nations' most pressing problems are to be found in the schools or, more specifically, in reformed schools. When citizens feel that their country is faltering in some fundamental respect, they, too, often blame the schools. Dissatisfaction with economic development and progress is increasingly likely to take the form of a backlash against schools and educators.

An important education policy problem concerns the question of **access to schooling**, or whom education is for. A nation's position on this issue is generally considered to be an important indicator of the **equality of opportunity** in a society. The equality of opportunity perspective assumes that school systems can compensate for existing social and economic inequalities in a society. The assumption is that universal access to schooling will serve as a leveler, as opposed to less open education systems that perpetuate existing social or economic divisions. Opponents of this view of education access believe that individuals differ innately in their capabilities and are not equally capable of benefiting from an education. Thus efforts to equalize education access squander resources. Supporters of the latter perspective advocate access to education systems based on achievement, especially in secondary schools and universities. Concerns about whether all students are receiving the same

type of education and about the substance of education also involve a debate over **liberal versus vocational education**. This is a debate between an orientation in which education is aimed at reducing social and economic inequalities and a market orientation that emphasizes education to promote global competitiveness.

The definition of education policy objectives has evolved over time and remains an unsettled issue: what should students learn? The list of potential objectives raised in the political debate is almost endless. Possible objectives include basic literacy, critical thinking skills, a well-rounded grounding in many fields of study, building of a shared national history and values, and technical training for a particular career—to name just a few. This problem area frequently raises questions about courses of study, national standards, and national testing or assessment programs.

The issue of who controls the education system is another education policy problem. Different countries create more or less centralized administrative structures. For example, federal political systems such as the United States tend to be more decentralized, delegating responsibility for education to the local level. In contrast, unitary political systems such as France and Japan are traditionally characterized by centralization of education decision-making authority at the national level. In most industrialized countries, the trend in recent years has been toward greater decentralization. Another dimension of the control over education is the issue of **public versus private schooling**. This dimension often involves the question of whether to permit religious schools to exist and of the appropriate allocation of public funds to these schools, where they exist. Nonreligious private schooling also raises concerns over control, in particular through pressures for more parental control and choice relative to local schools.

In considering the most pressing public policy choices encountered in the education arena, we focus on three areas of concern: (1) who will be educated, (2) what will that education entail, and (3) who will control the education system? All three issues are typically controversial, and in most countries a widely accepted view of schooling continues to be elusive.

## **Major Policy Options**

Policies that emphasize equality of opportunity are not the norm in most education systems. Many countries determine access to secondary and post-secondary education by means of competitive exams or other evaluations of an individual's **merit**. Because such mechanisms tend to reward those who were better off prior to entering the system, these policy choices tend to reinforce rather than reduce existing inequalities. For example, European systems, which rely on competitive exams, have traditionally reinforced rather than overcome class distinctions, with only a small percentage of university students coming from the middle and working classes. In systems that have

adopted equality of opportunity policies, such as in the United States, the emphasis on promoting equality has declined. In short, although the implication of a universal right to education is access for all, education policies in most countries stress merit over egalitarianism, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities.

The debate over liberal versus vocational education also results in policy controversy. Proponents of liberal, or general, education advocate traditional training of students in the classics as well as reading, writing, and arithmetic to provide for the full development of the individual. Supporters of vocational, or technical, training emphasize the development of useful skills that translate directly into specific occupational opportunities. This latter policy orientation raises questions about which skills are most needed to produce a well-trained, competitive global labor force and who should receive which skills. For example, who will be trained as workers, who as executives? Who will make these decisions? And what will this training entail?

Related to the question of what students should learn, a continuing matter of controversy in education policy concerns the content of the **curriculum**, or the course of study that education institutions offer. Should the curriculum be governed by **equality of provision**? That is, should the curriculum ensure that all students in an education system receive the same type of education, particularly with respect to subject matter? The content of the curriculum is not merely a question of liberal versus vocational education; rather, it involves debates over adopting Western, non-Western, multicultural, feminist, or religious perspectives. Because both economic outcomes and societal values are at stake, curricular reform is the source of considerable controversy. In recent years, pressures to adopt national curricula have increased in most industrialized countries. Adoption of such curricula entails the creation of a national standard for what students should know and be able to do in order to ensure equality of provision throughout the country.

Pressures to adopt a national curriculum often are accompanied by a move to create comprehensive standardized testing systems to assess student achievement and to measure equality of outcomes. Such tests also can be a matter of intense debate. Many critics of standardized tests argue that these exams are biased in favor of advantaged students and that they penalize students from diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Others question the ability of standardized tests to measure learning at all, particularly when it comes to assessing writing or the ability to reason or argue. Thus calls for curriculum reform are extremely contentious and meet with vehement opposition from educators, who often disagree with new education goals, reject restrictions on their academic freedom, and resent the reduction of education to “teaching to the test.”

The locus of education decision-making power has a number of important implications for the nature of education policy. For example, where education funding is decentralized (meaning education funds rely on local

revenue-raising capabilities), inequalities in expenditures per pupil are much more likely to occur among a nation's schools. In systems where education is controlled centrally, spending per pupil is likely to be equalized from locality to locality, and from student to student. As a result, increased centralization is a common response to calls for greater equality of provision. Centralization also permits the development of more common curricular goals and facilitates the pursuit of such goals by increasing the state's power over comprehensive policy implementation. Further, centralization of decision making also enables better monitoring of outcomes, particularly in regard to national education goals.

In decentralized systems, education policy is made at all levels of government—national, state, and local—resulting in a less focused policy agenda and greater access to this agenda. These systems exhibit a marked absence of national education policy. Decentralization also translates into somewhat greater potential for effective protest against controversial decisions (for example, textbook or curriculum choices), because the responsible policymakers tend to be more accessible and susceptible to pressure than are remote national politicians. Further, the initiation of policy change and participation in the decision-making process by educators tends to be less difficult in decentralized systems because educators tend to be more autonomous and to have developed their own power and financial resources. Local administration also allows for greater participation by local community members in these processes. Meaningful involvement in education decision making by both educators and citizens is far less likely in centralized systems where change is instituted by national politicians and bureaucrats. For these reasons, many observers believe that decentralized systems are more democratic.

A recent version of the decentralization approach to education reform emphasizes the need for parents to be able to choose among the schools in a system. School choice programs are intended to give parents more control over their children's education. Such programs involve financial assistance for education that is provided directly to individuals, not schools. Parents would be free to spend these funds at the school of their choice. The assumption of such an approach is that by giving parents the ability to take their "business" elsewhere, government would create a more competitive environment among schools and improve education quality overall. Under such a system, each school would presumably focus its efforts on attracting the greatest number of students (and additional funds) by improving the services it provides. The idea of school choice typically includes a variety of approaches: tuition tax credits, privately financed tuition reimbursement programs, an increased number of public charter schools, and tax-funded **vouchers** (Box 10-1).

Striking an appropriate balance between public and private education providers is a difficult and controversial task for political leaders. The desire of some parents to educate their children as they see fit creates conflict with national education policies. Countries differ in their approach to resolving

**Box 10-1 In Depth: The Voucher Movement in the United States**

A recent policy innovation in education is the voucher. This option involves the government issuing parents a voucher, or coupon, representing tax dollars they would use to pay tuition at the school of their choice, public or private (presumably only a partial payment for private schools). The assumption is that such a system increases parents' ability to evaluate and choose the educational styles and curriculum best suited to their children. Such a system, it is argued, relies on competition to improve schools as parents avoid poor quality schools, which then forces public schools to improve to compete with the presumed higher quality of private schools.

Public support for school choice in the United States has grown since the early 1990s. Public opinion polls indicate that a majority of the population favors allowing parents to send their children to the school of their choice (public, private, or religious) with government funding. Support has risen across socioeconomic groups for the general idea of school choice, but especially for vouchers, as those living in economically disadvantaged areas have come to view vouchers as their best chance for improving the educational opportunities available to their children.

Some of those who oppose the use of vouchers claim that their advocates want these vouchers to be available to all income groups, however, not just low-income families. To date, most voucher proposals and programs in the United States involve an income cap, but many opponents claim that the ultimate goal is universal vouchers. Were these to be implemented, the country's educational systems would become even more unequal, opponents claim, because private schools can accommodate only a small percentage of the country's students.

Opponents of the voucher system argue that such a system would reinforce and encourage existing social and economic divisions and would not improve most schools. Instead, dual education systems based on socioeconomic factors would emerge, with private schools improving and public schools worsening. For these reasons, they argue, the use of vouchers would serve the interests of a privileged few and remove their interest in the overall quality of public education. Those opposed to such a system further maintain that it reduces the diversity of experiences that public schools provide by serving students with different backgrounds.

this conflict. Some countries, such as the United States, allow religious schools to exist but deny government funding to these institutions. This approach usually results in a marked inequality in the provision of education in that private religious schools are less well equipped (or are better equipped but at tremendous cost to parents).

The public versus private schooling issue also encompasses nonreligious private schools. These institutions are most controversial in countries where

private school students enjoy a distinct advantage over public school students, especially in university admissions or in seeking employment, thereby allowing the wealthy to maintain their privileged status. The controversy tends to surround the right of these institutions to exist and may be manifested in abolition campaigns. Such campaigns usually maintain that those who can afford to do so should not be allowed to purchase a better education at private schools. Controversy in this policy area intensifies to the degree that successful private schools highlight the deficiencies of public schools. That is, where the quality of public schools is poor, people are more likely to resent private institutions.

### **Explaining Policy Dynamics**

The study of the education policy-making process is often described as being more descriptive than theoretical. Scholars tend to describe the processes surrounding education reform in the industrialized countries (particularly beyond the United States) rather than place their studies within some wider or explicitly theoretical framework. Although the atheoretical nature of this field has changed somewhat in recent years, our understanding of policy processes in this area is often based on descriptive case studies, primarily focusing on the United States and the other Anglo-American countries.

#### **Cultural Explanations**

Cultural factors are commonly used to explain education policy reform. Researchers note the importance of public attitudes both for setting the reform agenda and for policy outputs. More specifically, contemporary movements for reform are argued to have emerged from widespread public perceptions that education systems had lowered their standards and were failing to prepare students to function in a more competitive economic environment (Ambler 1987). These attitudes resulted in reforms that stressed a return to basic education; emphasized discipline and effort; and focused on training students to serve more internationalized, high-technology, knowledge-based economic systems.

Another cultural explanation for contemporary reform involves the prevailing ideology in a country. Researchers note a shift in values in industrialized countries relative to education. From the 1930s to 1980, education policy in many countries focused on equity and social justice, whereas since the early 1980s education policy has stressed freedom and excellence. This value shift is argued to reflect the resurgence of classic liberal ideology—favoring deregulation, decentralization, and varying degrees of privatization (Eliason 1996; Lauglo 1996). This return to a liberal ideology results in education reforms that stress economic efficiency, choice, and market mechanisms (Iannacone 1988). More specifically, this ideological shift is apparent

in the move from an emphasis on equality and access to education to an emphasis on education excellence, selectivity, and choice (Boyd 1996; Boyd and Kerchner 1987). In the Anglo-American countries, resurgent liberalism in the 1980s and early 1990s led reform advocates to argue that schools should be subject to regulation by market forces rather than by the government—and thus be forced to respond to parental demands (Ambler 1987; Chubb and Moe 1990). These reform advocates argued that school choice would achieve three goals: higher average academic achievement, lower costs, and greater equality of opportunity.

Cultural perspectives also point to the importance of culturally based education traditions in defining a country's approach to reform. This literature stresses the importance of deeply imbued cultural attitudes about the most desirable kinds of knowledge, the best ways of transmitting it, and the means for deciding who will benefit from education. These values are shared across cultures and influence education policy decisions. Thus the emphasis on individualism and equality of opportunity that characterizes Anglo-American countries, as opposed to the more collectivist and social equality cultural norms found in France or Germany, have significant implications for questions about education access, content, and control (Fowler, Boyd, and Plank 1993; Fusarelli 2003; McLean 1988, 1995; Rust and Blakemore 1990). In the United States, for example, important cultural values include an emphasis on freedom, quality, efficiency, and equity, with education policy outputs reflecting, at least in part, the country's positions on these values at the time (Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt 1989). Conversely, in Japan, the cultural importance of group identity, uniformity, hierarchy, and centralization results in very different policy outputs (Wray 1999).

### Economic Explanations

Many researchers argue that education reforms can be explained by concerns about globalization and increasing international economic competition. Reform efforts are viewed as having been stimulated in part by worries about more intense global competition and the need to develop a better educated workforce to enable countries to compete effectively and enhance their global economic position (Boyd 1996; Boyd and Kerchner 1987; Wirt and Hartman 1986). As industrialized countries increasingly are defined by interdependent, postindustrial, and knowledge-based economic systems, their demands for more effective schooling escalate. In this context, existing approaches to education are viewed as slow, outdated, and incapable of producing necessary improvements in student preparation. These perceptions result in pressures on the government to design and implement centrally controlled standards and accountability schemes for their school systems (Boyd and Kerchner 1987; Cibulka 1996; Coombs 1985; Eliason 1996; Ginsburg et. al. 1990; McLean 1995; Wirt and Hartman 1986).

### Political Explanations

The partisanship thesis introduced in Chapter 2 can be important for understanding education reform, particularly when examining cross-national differences in education spending. As expected, left-wing governing parties are more likely to favor and achieve increased government spending on education. However, as Ambler (1987) notes, although changes in partisan control may affect education spending levels, the inherent complexity and relative autonomy of education institutions create particularly strong resistance to other types of education reforms. He argues that sometimes, even when a party that comes to power is intent on major reform (such as the Conservatives under Thatcher in the United Kingdom or the Socialists under Mitterrand in France), the nature of the education system itself (its size, complexity, and tendency toward bureaucratic inertia) may interfere with that party's capacity to achieve its goals.

A multitude of scholars, examining the full range of industrialized countries, point to the influence of highly mobilized, powerful, and entrenched interests in affecting education reforms. In all countries, interest groups (especially teachers' unions but also parents associations, education administrators, business groups, and religious groups) place limits on the ability of governments to initiate and implement widespread education reforms. In pluralist systems, interest group activities are seen as a prime driver of education decision making, but such movements also are argued to play a strong role under more corporatist arrangements. In the education policy area, interest groups are frequently argued to be strong enough to override the distinction between unitary and federal political systems regarding the access they provide such groups. Even in unitary political systems, groups representing the various sectors of the education establishment have been highly successful in shaping reforms (Ambler 1987; Cibulka 2001; Elmore 1997; Fusarelli 2003; Kogan 1971; McLean 1988; Rust and Blakemore 1990; Spring 1998).

### Institutional Explanations

Institutional approaches to understanding education policy reform focus on the degree of centralization of political authority. In most policy areas, centralization of decision-making authority is regarded as being advantageous for reform. In examining education reforms, however, researchers take issue with the centralization thesis. They note that centralization is most effective in policy areas in which power is centralized in the hands of relatively few individuals. In education policy, this is usually not the case, even in more centralized political systems. The size and complexity of education systems—as well as their relative autonomy—is the problem here (Ambler 1987). Education systems may create a powerful set of vested interests. For example, in France (a highly centralized country), successful education reforms require broad support in public opinion as a means of getting the system moving because



of the strength and inertia of the education establishment. Such public support is necessary to put pressure on teachers and their unions to accept change. In the absence of such public support, the education establishment often is able to block or delay new policies proposed by government, with centralization giving government no great advantage (Duclaud-Williams 1988). Along these same lines, however, decentralized systems are argued to fare no better in enacting education reforms because of the multiple points at which these same opponents of reform can block change.

## International Policy Making

When it comes to education policy, little in the way of international policy making exists. Education policy is a domain in which countries are very protective of their national sovereignty and in which a high degree of policy flexibility and independence is maintained. There are no major international agreements that establish norms or practices for education. Beyond national sovereignty issues, the lack of international cooperation on these matters may also reflect the fact that in many countries education policy making is highly decentralized. Lower levels of government often are reluctant enough to surrender authority over education policy to their own central governments. As a result, it is even more difficult to envision them transferring their decision-making powers to some still further removed external body.

Education is a policy area in which the European Union (EU) has exercised considerable restraint. This is true regarding its present policy position and its plans for the future. Under the Maastricht Treaty, the EU's education mandate is to play a supporting role to the member states. The treaty does not authorize the union to issue directives or regulations pertaining to education that are legally binding on members. Instead, the EU's role is to encourage cooperation by member states on education issues and to supplement and support their education efforts. Beyond these activities, we currently find no other major international education policies at work.

## United States

### Background: Policy Process and Policy History

The United States, with its multiple centers of decision-making power, has no comprehensive national education policy. Specific education goals and spending levels vary across both states and localities. Because the financing of education at the local level usually is based on property taxes, funding differs markedly across school districts. Typically students who live in more affluent districts attend better quality schools than do children living in poorer areas. To address this inequality, states and the federal government have created policies aimed at equalizing education provision across districts. The most recent policy innovations in this regard require states and localities to comply with federal education mandates to receive federal education funds. In this

sense, U.S. policies are becoming somewhat more similar to the centralized approach common in other industrialized countries.

Constitutionally, education is a state responsibility, although most states have delegated authority to operate and finance schools to local education authorities, or school districts. The federal government plays a limited role in the governance of education but provides funding to states and school districts, mostly to support programs for students with special educational needs. The government also provides financial aid to students in the form of scholarships and loans to support their participation in postsecondary education. State and local school districts provide the vast majority of funds for public elementary and secondary education. Because no state has taken responsibility for financing public schools, nor do any seem likely to do so, the tradition of local autonomy is likely to live on.

This diffusion of jurisdiction has fostered a profusion of uncoordinated policies. The United States has over 15,000 school districts (governed through school boards by more than 95,000 citizens), and in recent years a shift to greater federal and state regulation of local districts has been made in order to create greater equality and effectiveness. The United States is unique with respect to the number of issues and responsibilities that these local school boards confront: everything from budgets to maintenance to the curriculum. These boards are burdened with many responsibilities that in other countries are dispersed among many levels of government and bureaucrats. Local school boards also tend to be highly politicized.

The issue of school choice has been on the political agenda in the United States since the 1980s, first in the form of an unsuccessful effort to create a national system of vouchers (although some states and localities have introduced the use of vouchers) and then with charter school plans that many states have adopted. Charter school laws create independent public schools that are largely free from government control but are held accountable for education results agreed upon in each school's charter.

The United States has traditionally endorsed the view that all citizens have a right to an education. This belief reflects the notion that a key element of effective democracy is an educated citizenry. Thus education is regarded as important not only for the improvement and success of the individual but also for molding democratic citizens. Reflecting this emphasis, the U.S. education system expanded during the twentieth century, and the average level of education attainment rose.

Compulsory education begins at age six or seven in the majority of states, but most children enter kindergarten in a public elementary school at age five. Compulsory schooling ends at age sixteen in over half the states, but a large majority of young adults (73 percent in 1990–1996) continue their education and receive regular high school diplomas at age seventeen or eighteen. Full-time primary schooling begins at age six and ends at age twelve or thirteen. Students then enter middle school (grades 6–8) or junior high

school (grades 7–9) and then proceed to secondary school for grades 9–12 (or 10–12). This pathway results in a single-track system. Secondary schools in the United States provide a choice between general, college preparatory, or vocational tracks (the latter do not provide comprehensive vocational training of the sort found in Germany, however). About two-thirds of students enroll in the college preparatory and general tracks, and just under one-third enroll in the vocational track.

The United States does not have a national curriculum or curriculum framework, although since 2001 states have developed curriculum frameworks and performance standards to meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2002). Specification of the curriculum and selection of textbooks are usually delegated by the states to local school districts. Also in line with No Child Left Behind, since 2001 states have mandated state-wide testing programs to assess individual student performance against state-established performance standards (these standards must be approved by the U.S. Department of Education). Across the country, students are tested annually in grades three to eight in reading and math, and all students are tested at least once per level (elementary, middle, and high school) in science.

Recent efforts at education reform have placed increasing emphasis on the provision of vocational alternatives at the secondary level. One area of controversy with respect to vocational education has concerned the type of training that should be provided. For example, should students be trained for one specific job, should they be provided with more general skills that can later be refined through on-the-job training, or should they receive a comprehensive education combined with specific job skills? Because this question generally remains unanswered, the United States has advanced in the provision of vocational education far less than have the other industrialized countries.

### Contemporary Dynamics

Education policies in the United States have been undergoing continuous reform since the early 1980s. Two reform trends have influenced U.S. education systems: the imposition of uniform standards and a push for greater accountability. Reforms in the United States are based on an assumption that academic achievement will be improved by establishing rigorous education standards, uniform curricula, and assessment tests. The goal of such reforms is better quality, not greater equity. Early criticisms of the U.S. education system emerged from within the business community; these criticisms in turn tapped into growing public concerns about the deteriorating quality of public schools.

Concerns about education related to international competitiveness date back to 1983 with the publication of a federal commission's report, *A Nation at Risk*. The report claimed that the United States was losing its ability to compete in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. This was blamed

on an education system that had failed to do its job, as evidenced by almost two decades of decline in student achievement levels. *A Nation at Risk* launched what is commonly referred to as the excellence movement, which argued that the United States had to intensify its education approach to increase rigor, raise graduation standards for students and teachers, and reemphasize the importance of education overall. The business community and public opinion quickly galvanized around the report's findings, and education reform became situated firmly on the country's institutional agenda, where it has remained to the present day. In a clear example of the outside initiation agenda-setting model, reaction to this report almost single-handedly placed education reform on the institutional agenda for nearly three decades.

Despite the prominent position of education reform on the institutional agenda in the 1980s and 1990s, comprehensive reform proved difficult to achieve. The Reagan administration initially responded to this agenda by devolving a great deal of education decision-making authority to states and reducing the federal government's role overall. Beyond this, the administration did not develop any comprehensive response to calls for change. After a protracted and highly partisan debate, President George H. W. Bush's America 2000 plan failed to win congressional approval—in a classic example of the effects of divided government and the policy gridlock it can produce. President Clinton's Goals 2000 plan was enacted by Congress in 1994, again after intense debate, but failed to achieve all of its intended results in the implementation stage, where powerful education interest groups failed to support the reforms and actively worked to obstruct these new policies.

By the time President George W. Bush arrived in office in 2001, education issues still figured prominently on the institutional agenda. Comprehensive reform had not yet been fully achieved, despite the continuing national uproar surrounding the poor state of American education, which was seen as both expensive and ineffective. In response, and following through on a campaign pledge, President Bush introduced his education reform plans three days after his inauguration in 2001. The centerpiece of his standards, teaching, and accountability plan is known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The primary goal of NCLB was for all students to be “proficient” in reading, mathematics, and science by the 2013–2014 academic year. Under the legislation, federal financial support to schools would be tied to students' progress on annual standardized tests. Since 2005 NCLB requires testing for students in grades 3 through 8 every year in reading and math. Since 2008, science testing also is mandatory at least once per level of schooling (elementary, middle, and high school). In addition, each year, a sample of fourth- and eighth-grade students from each state must participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress program in reading and math. The law also requires states and school systems to develop standards for what students should know and be able to do. Finally, NCLB mandates that teachers be “highly qualified” for

their positions. Based on their testing results, schools face penalties if they fail to meet the established standards (or, at a minimum, make “adequate yearly progress” [AYP] toward these standards). If schools fail to improve after four years, their principals can be fired. Under NCLB, schools must provide parents with annual reports. The policy also intends for parents to be given the chance to move their children from poor quality schools or to receive funds to pay for tutors.

The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law in 2002 after a year of debate and compromise. When it was approved, the law was considered to be the most sweeping federal legislation in the country’s history. Remarkably, given that political conflict is inevitable in large-scale education reform in the United States, the NCLB bill was embraced on both sides of the aisle and by key education policy stakeholders. This legislation constitutes one of the rare instances of collaboration between Democratic congressional leaders and the Bush White House. There was general bipartisan agreement about the overall aim of the legislation—ensuring the education of every child. In addition, consensus was encouraged by the president, who quickly dropped private school vouchers from the reform in the face of Democratic objections, rather than digging in on the issue, which was important to many Republicans. National standards and increasing accountability, the bill’s core values, were embraced not just by Republicans but also by many Democrats. During debate on the bill, teachers, administrators, and the public also endorsed the principles on which NCLB was based, especially the idea that it was designed to help correct the imbalance between wealthier and poorer school districts.

The widespread embrace of NCLB did not last for long, however. Since its implementation in 2002, NCLB has been the source of tremendous controversy. As implementation of the plan proceeded, state resistance mounted and politicians from both parties have become increasingly unhappy with the law. Many states were dissatisfied with insufficient levels of federal funding and the law’s strict timetables for raising student achievement. By 2004, bills challenging the law had been introduced in thirty-one state legislatures. These bills primarily reflected states’ unhappiness over being forced to implement the law “on the cheap.” The states were not off-base with this perception; Congress appropriated \$27 billion less than it authorized for the bill’s implementation, leaving states with unaffordable, unfunded NCLB mandates. The National Education Association, the country’s largest teachers’ union, and eight school districts in three states sued the Department of Education on the grounds that forcing states to fund the law’s implementation themselves violates a provision of NCLB. The state of Connecticut also threatened to sue on this basis.

As implementation proceeded, the law also came under fire from local school officials, who viewed the law’s implementation as too focused on standardized testing, resulting in too much classroom time being devoted to “teaching to the test.” The law was due for reauthorization in 2007, but the highly charged controversy that its implementation generated made

lawmakers skittish in the approach to an election year and the review was postponed. Most lawmakers and educators agree that NCLB has big problems that need to be fixed, although some evidence, such as higher test scores, indicates a shrinking performance gap between rich and poor students and improved urban schools, which suggests that some aspects of the law have worked. The law's reauthorization will be the first education reform project for the Obama administration.

Comprehensive education reform in the United States, both the decision to engage in reform and the nature of the reform itself, resulted from a set of interrelated factors. For twenty years, fears about the country losing its ability to compete in the global marketplace drove public attitudes on education reform. These concerns were echoed by the business community, which sought to shape education systems to meet its employment needs. The perception that U.S. students did not measure up to their peers in other industrialized countries—and that this shortcoming was detrimental to the country's future economic strength—was sufficient to drive large-scale reform. In addition, the ease with which this legislation passed was a remarkable exception to the typical pattern of executive-legislative relations in the United States. In this instance, we observed the effects of a rare consensus between Democratic leaders in Congress and a Republican president in the White House. This consensus reflected, at least in part, the legacy of failed education reform efforts over the previous two decades. By 2001 there was widespread agreement that the time had come to make comprehensive education reform a reality. At the implementation stage, this bipartisan consensus broke down, however, and the president's signature domestic policy achievement ran into a host of difficulties that have set the stage for yet another overhaul of U.S. education policies in the near future.

## **Japan**

### **Background: Policy Process and Policy History**

The national government administers education in Japan through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (known as the Ministry of Education or MEXT). The Ministry of Education creates guidelines for the curriculum and courses, and approves textbooks. National government education expenditures include direct expenditures for national education activities (for example, operating national universities and schools); specific subsidies for the education activities of other institutions (that is, prefectures, municipalities, private schools, and research organizations); and local allocation of a tax grant, part of which is for education. Boards of education exist at the prefectural and municipal levels. Prefectural boards administer schools (upper secondary and special education) established by the prefectures, whereas municipal boards administer mainly elementary and lower secondary schools established by the local authorities.

A commitment to the widespread provision of education in Japan can be traced to the nineteenth century. A Fundamental Code of Education was promulgated in 1872 that established literacy as a national goal. After World War II, the Japanese education system was reorganized in line with the U.S. model. Until 1987 the plan for Japan's education system was laid out in the 1947 Fundamental Law on Education. This system experienced reform for the first time in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Subsequent reforms were enacted in 2004.

The primary education policy objective in Japan is declared to be the provision of equal access to a high quality of education to all students in the country, regardless of where they live. Compulsory education is from ages six to fifteen, with upper secondary schools serving those aged fifteen to eighteen. Nearly 97 percent of students graduating from lower secondary schools go on to upper secondary schools (which are not compulsory). Japan has a single-track school system comparable to that found in the United States.

Upper secondary schools admit entrants based on a selection process that considers student credentials, scholastic test records, and other factors. This selection process determines the distribution of students among upper secondary schools, not access to education, which is universal. For university admissions, however, students take a standard commercially developed test as well as tests administered by each university. University admissions are based almost exclusively on performance on these entrance exams; this system has produced what is widely viewed as an excessively competitive examination process.

About 25 percent of students go on to universities and 30 percent to other forms of postsecondary education. In principle a student may apply to any university from any upper secondary school, but in practice a strong link exists between the status of the upper secondary school attended and university admissions. In seeking admission to a particular university, Japanese students are more likely to have based their choice on the placement and status of an institution's graduates than on the quality of its education program. Reflecting these conditions, efforts have been developed to reduce the single criterion of a standard exam score in career guidance, and schools have been encouraged to diversify their selection criteria.

The national government sets curriculum standards for elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools. The Ministry of Education has issued a document called the Course of Study, which defines Japan's general education standards for curricula, textbooks, and entrance exams. These standards provide the basic framework for curricula including the aims of each subject and school activity, the content of teaching at each grade level, and the basis for teacher training. Curriculum revisions were enacted from 1992 to 1994 that emphasized independent learning activities and students thinking for themselves rather than the traditional one-dimensional transmission of knowledge and skills from teacher to student. More recent (and controversial) reforms, in 2007, list "public spirit" and an "attitude of loving

the nation” as important education goals. The reforms are designed to imbue students with a better sense of the nation’s history and culture. Each school is left to organize its curriculum as it sees fit to reflect these guidelines and to take into account the conditions of the community and the school as well as the characteristics and development levels of its pupils.

Student performance in meeting the objectives of the national curriculum is assessed by individual teachers on a case-by-case basis rather than through national examinations. At the secondary level, studies have traditionally been focused on academic subjects; an extensive vocational education program does not exist. In postsecondary education, technical and junior colleges provide technical and vocational education.

### Contemporary Dynamics

As in the United States, Japan is concerned about international competitiveness and education reform. Since the mid-1980s many Japanese have been critical of the country’s education system for failing to create the sort of workers that employers need in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. More specifically, the public became concerned that the system was failing to encourage creativity and individualism and that this had serious ramifications for the abilities of Japan’s future workforce. Unlike most of the countries examined in this book, however, Japan was unsuccessful in moving its education system in dramatically new directions in the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, little movement had been made away from a highly centralized system of control. Rather, small-scale reforms ushered in during the 1990s focused on changing the internal aspects of education, such as reducing the stress of the competitive exams or changing the manner in which teachers were trained. By the late 1990s, public dissatisfaction with the education system was such that substantial reform seemingly became inevitable. Higher education was the first sector to be tackled, reflecting strong public sentiment that universities were failing to adequately prepare students in multiple ways.

In 1999 then–prime minister Junichiro Koizumi initiated higher education reform in earnest, requesting that the MEXT present him with a reform plan. In a marked break from the traditional hallmarks of Japan’s educational system, the prime minister’s request made clear his interest in the possibility of privatizing the country’s public university system. The policy development process was distinguished by a protracted period of bureaucratic infighting between MEXT and METI (the Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry) and their supporting interest groups. METI was a powerful advocate for economic liberalization in the country overall and strongly encouraged higher education reforms that were oriented toward the demands of industry and greater institutional autonomy. MEXT was reluctant initially to move in METI’s preferred direction lest it undermine its own substantial power over the education system. In addition, a move toward privatization constituted a dramatic cultural shift in the Japanese approach to education. In the past, reform efforts that



stressed individualism, competition, or autonomy were rejected by the ministry because they contradicted accepted cultural norms. However, MEXT eventually conceded to the prime minister and METI's preferences, recognizing that the momentum for a liberalizing reform of the system—both within the government and among the general public—was too powerful to overcome or resist. Determined to gain the upper hand in the reform process, the ministry presented an even more market-oriented reform proposal than had been advocated by METI or the prime minister. Although its proposal made dramatic concessions in the area of university autonomy, the plan also was constructed to ensure that MEXT retained considerable power over the university system by maintaining indirect control via bureaucratic guidance.

Thus a series of cabinet-level decisions from April 1999 to November 2002 culminated in the 2003 National University Corporation Law and five related laws, all of which easily received parliamentary approval. In April 2004 all public universities were converted to National University Corporations (NUCs), in the most dramatic reform to the Japanese education system since the late nineteenth century. Under the law, universities were granted administrative independence to foster competition and to allow them to develop partnerships with industry. The reforms made major changes to universities' missions, budgetary systems, patterns of governance, and their relationship with the central government, while maintaining a role for MEXT in planning and decision making.

Education reform in Japan is a policy area in which change comes as a result of bureaucratic consultation and decision making rather than through legislative debate or law making. Thus the policy formulation and decision-making stages of education reform occurred not in the Diet but in a bureaucratic and cabinet-level consultation process. Based on a mandate from the prime minister, the Ministry of Education pursued reform through administrative guidance, which eliminates opportunities for debate, opposition, or the exertion of external influence. This is a process of incremental change within existing frameworks that leaves little space for opposition. Because policy change occurred and continues to occur through administrative rather than legislative action, few implementation concerns surround education reforms.

The drive for education reform in Japan can be explained largely by economic factors. Although the Japanese economy was strong in the 1980s, the Japanese became increasingly concerned that their education system was not training students adequately to be creative and innovative—two qualities recognized as essential to future economic success. The 2004 reform of Japan's universities, in particular the acceptance of movement toward greater privatization and liberalization, is a notable change from earlier attempts at reform. Traditionally, the Japanese education system does not emphasize individuality, competition, and freedom, reflecting the traditional Japanese value system. Consequently, previous reform efforts that have stressed individualism, choice, and school autonomy were rejected because they contradicted accepted cultural norms. By early in the twenty-first century, however, ongoing and

intensifying concerns about the country's global economic competitiveness proved more influential than traditional values, and a major reform of the higher education system was accomplished.

## **Germany**

### **Background: Policy Process and Policy History**

The control of education in Germany reflects the country's federal structure. According to Article 7 of the Basic Law, the entire school system is under the control of the state governments, but this responsibility in practice is shared by federal and state governments. In each state, schools are usually maintained by either municipalities or the state, whereas higher education institutions are state-level institutions. Education legislation and its administration is developed and adopted largely by the states. States and municipalities carry over 90 percent of education expenditures. Each of the sixteen state governments enjoys full control over the organization and structure of its education system. Since 1971 the states have been legally bound to maintain comparable basic structures in their school systems, and a Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs meets regularly to provide for greater harmonization of policies across school systems.

The German education system traditionally was seen by many as the envy of the world. It was distinguished by the high quality of its graduates and the considerable attention paid to vocational education at the secondary and post-secondary levels. As a result, citizen dissatisfaction and subsequent calls for education reform historically have not been as strong in Germany as in many of the other countries we are considering. However, German policymakers have addressed questions of reform in recent years, particularly with respect to higher education, although not on the scale observed in some other countries.

German education structures involve a multi-track system offering general, technical, and vocational options. Full-time education is compulsory between the ages of six and fifteen or sixteen (depending on the state). Part-time education is compulsory until the age of eighteen for students who do not choose to pursue upper secondary education full time. Part-time education takes place in vocational schools in a dual system that combines practical on-the-job training with in-school theoretical instruction. Secondary school students receive one of three qualifications: a lower secondary school qualification after eight or nine years of schooling (with or without vocational training), an intermediate school qualification after ten years (vocational or nonvocational), or an upper secondary qualification after twelve or thirteen years. Students who leave school with lower or intermediate secondary qualifications are likely to enter vocational training in the dual system or serve a two- to three-year apprenticeship.

Higher education in Germany consists of either professional colleges or universities, entrance to which requires an upper secondary school

qualification. A reform process is under way in this sector in an effort to improve institutional efficiency and address problems of insufficient space. An identified problem in higher education is the length of time it takes students to complete their education, which averages around seven years. Insufficient space has forced the government to introduce admissions restrictions in some subject areas. Until recently, tuition was free at public institutions; some states now impose tuition fees in their higher education institutions.

State ministries of education develop their curricula to reflect guidelines developed at the national level. To ensure some degree of uniformity in curricula and standards across states, a standardization process has been developed. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs oversees state education systems to ensure a baseline of provision across the states while respecting state autonomy. The process of incorporating the five new eastern states has raised some concern over whether such a balance will be sustained in the future or whether the federal government will have to intervene to ensure the maintenance of such standards.

Reflecting a decentralized education system, Germany does not use national testing or large-scale assessments of students. In particular, state governments are resistant to any movement toward cross-state comparisons. The German government monitors the performance of the education system by paying strict attention to teacher training, establishing compulsory curricula for all sixteen states for all subjects and areas of study in all types of schools, and ensuring that textbooks comply fully with the curriculum.

Among the industrialized countries, Germany has one of the most well-developed and extensive systems of vocational schools. A clear goal of the government is that no young person should begin his or her working life without some form of vocational training. Currently, about 1.6 million students are receiving some form of vocational training, and vocational schools are required for all young people under age eighteen who attend no other type of school. This training is a joint effort between private business and industry and the public sector. In addition, at the postsecondary level, two- to three-and-a-half-year internships are available that provide a paid training allowance that increases for each year of service. More than 500,000 German firms participate in the apprenticeship program.

### Contemporary Dynamics

Until recently, the generally strong state of the German education system meant that education reform was not a perennial political battle in this country. Overall, quality and efficiency were not education concerns. However, like the other countries examined here, concerns about globalization, the workforce, and especially mounting financial pressures placed notions of competition, autonomy, and efficiency on the education reform agenda. This was particularly true in the higher education sector. Unlike other aspects of the education system, higher education has been subject to reform attempts

over the past several decades. By the late 1980s, common complaints about the higher education system included too-long periods of study (some lasting as long as ten years), overflowing lecture halls, too little contact between teachers and students and between researchers and industry, and a lack of comparability between German and international qualifications. In June 1995 Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel called for reform of higher education based on his feeling that such reforms were needed to make Germany more competitive in foreign trade. The result was the 1998 Framework Law on Higher Education (which amended the 1976 Framework Act). This law aimed at improving performance, giving universities greater autonomy, and making them more competitive at the international level. Following this law, states were required to reform their higher education policies. The reforms led to many changes, but the financial pressures on higher education continued to be significant. Thus, despite the recent reforms, demands continued for further government action, particularly from students, but also from within the German business community and among some conservative politicians. Perhaps more important, there now were calls from university heads, as well as conservative-controlled state governments, for the government to introduce student fees to increase university revenues.

The question of tuition fees was a controversial one: opponents feared them as a first step in releasing the state from its obligation to fund higher education (or, at a minimum, increasing the likelihood of significant reductions in state support) and as unfairly limiting access to higher education only to those who could afford it. More generally, opponents did not believe that the government should be in the business of “selling” education to students. Advocates for tuition fees believed such fees would make universities more competitive and encourage students to complete their degrees more quickly. They also argued that fees represented the only feasible way to finance an ever-expanding higher education system in the future. University rectors favored tuition fees as a last resort to solve the ongoing and worsening fiscal crisis in higher education. On the right wing of the political spectrum, both the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Free Democratic Party were fee supporters. On the left, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Green Party were committed to the principle of government-supported higher education and opposed tuition fees, arguing in particular that they would be prohibitive for many students and, as such, economically discriminatory. Not surprisingly, students of all political stripes were generally opposed to the introduction of fees, as were most academics.

In a reflection of partisan differences on the issue (and in the lead-up to a general election), the Social Democratic–Green Party governing coalition in 2002 passed a law in the Bundestag guaranteeing students’ rights to complete their first university degree program free of charge. The introduction and passage of this education reform was somewhat unusual for Germany, where education policies are not usually introduced at the federal level because states

are constitutionally individually responsible for their own education systems. The 2002 law (the sixth amendment to the 1976 Framework Act) prohibited all German states from charging fees to students who were taking more than the usual length of time to complete their degrees. The law was directed toward states like Baden-Württemberg, which had begun charging undergraduates who had been pursuing their degree for more than six years \$550 a semester in 1998. All the states that charged fees before the 2002 ban were controlled by Christian Democratic or conservative-dominated governments. In introducing the ban, Gerhard Schröder's government argued that these fees violated the principle of equal opportunity for all Germans, regardless of their socioeconomic status. But, in the lead-up to a general election, this also was a tactical move by the SPD, since their CDU rivals were staunch fee supporters. The Social Democrats believed the fee ban would be a vote-winner, since most Germans viewed free education as a fundamental right.

The government's majority control of the Bundestag made the law's passage easily achieved. Its enactment, however, created considerable unrest at the state level. Although the law acknowledged that exceptions could be made to the jurisdiction of individual states, six states (all controlled by the opposition parties) immediately challenged the measure in the Federal Constitutional Court, arguing that it violated states' self-rule in educational and cultural matters and that it was an unconstitutional interference into the states' higher education budgetary autonomy. The Federal Court ruled, in January 2005, that the law was unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated the constitutional rights of German states to regulate higher education. The Court's decision dismissed all legal obstacles to the introduction of fees at universities across Germany. Further, although before 2005 states could charge fees only to students who significantly exceeded their regular study time, after the Court decision this principle no longer applied. Immediately following the ruling, several states announced the introduction of tuition fees (notably, states governed by the SPD continued to shun fees). In most states, the introductory fees were capped at 500 euros per semester, although the amount varied across states.

The implementation of fees across the country (now for all students, not just those taking an unusually long time to complete their studies) was met by widespread and angry student protests. Those opposed to the reforms embraced the mantra "Education is no commodity." To students, the tuition fees constituted an assault on their fundamental rights. They occupied Berlin's city hall, staged tuition boycotts, and sued in court to have the tuition requirement removed. Professors (who are not permitted to strike) staged lectures in busy public spaces to draw attention to the issue. Although students' dissatisfaction with the fees remains apparent, the policy has since 2005 safely enjoyed the protection of Angela Merkel's CDU-controlled government.

The 2002 reform attempt illustrates the difficulty the German government faces in introducing education legislation at the central level. Even when the

governing coalition controls a strong majority at the center, the constitutional authority accorded to the states in the education realm makes nationwide educational policy making nearly impossible. Intensive debate continues perennially between the federal government and the states about the nature of reform. What little is decided upon by the central government is often diluted by the states, which are protective of their powers in educational matters. In this instance, federalism, as well as the disparate educational perspectives of the main political parties, made it impossible for the central government to impose reform on the education system as whole. Reform ultimately occurred by 2005, but in the exact opposite direction from what the SPD-controlled government intended. The states' powers to check the federal government's plans—either through voting in the Bundesrat or, in this case, via the Constitutional Court—give them the upper hand in determining the direction of policy.

The German government's decision to place higher education reform on the institutional agenda reflected the influence of economic factors. Problems in higher education had been pointed out by German students and others for many years; however, the government did not respond until concerns became based on arguments about the country's loss of international economic competitiveness. Once the German economy faltered in the early 1990s, concerns that the country was losing its competitive edge became widespread; at the same time, universities came under increasing budgetary pressure. The government's response was not comprehensive; instead, it constituted a political power-play, and the federal nature of the German political system determined the eventual path of this reform effort. Finally, partisan differences played an important role—the federal government was controlled by the SPD, which opposed fees, whereas the states that challenged the law were controlled by Christian Democrats. In the end, reform happened, but not the reform the SPD-controlled federal government had in mind when it initiated the policy reform process in 2002.

## **France**

### **Background: Policy Process and Policy History**

In 1985 the French government began the process of transferring some education decision-making powers to regional administrations and decentralizing education responsibilities to elected local authorities. Each level of government was made responsible for a tier of education: communes for nursery and primary school management, departments for maintenance and construction of lower secondary schools, and regions for upper secondary schools and for education planning. Secondary schools and universities were made more independent, although postsecondary education continues to be largely centrally controlled.

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Despite such changes, however, a good deal in the French education system remains under the domain of the national government, including teacher recruitment and pay, the framing and implementation of general education policy, the national curriculum and the national exam, and the right to confer university diplomas. National government also continues to fund two-thirds of total expenditures on education. By the late 1980s education expenditures made up the largest part of the national budget.

The French education system has been public, uniform, compulsory, and centralized since the late nineteenth century. Education in France continues to be widely considered the foremost national priority, both to impart knowledge and to transmit a sense of national identity. Education also is seen as a democratic right and is viewed as an important mechanism for creating equality of opportunity.

Among the industrialized countries, France has one of the highest levels of education activity: French students spend longer in school (an average of 18.9 years) and are more likely to go on to higher education. Education in France is compulsory for ages six to sixteen and is divided into primary, secondary, and upper secondary levels. General, vocational, and technological education is provided at the secondary level. Higher education is open to all holders of secondary degrees (the *baccalaureat*).

The 1989 Education Act makes a clear commitment to creating equality of education opportunities, with an emphasis on equal access and outcomes. The French education system was expanded substantially in the 1980s in an endeavor to ensure that 80 percent of eligible students would complete upper secondary level education and obtain the *baccalaureat*. As a result of this expansion, in the 1990s approximately 70 percent of eligible students entered upper secondary education, twice as many as in 1980. This increase has also resulted in a significant increase in higher education enrollments—2.1 million enrolled in universities in 1996, compared with just over 1 million in 1980.

Under the 1989 Education Act, new standards for the country's common curriculum were adopted. This curriculum, set at the national level, defines both subject matter and the number of hours to be devoted to each subject; it may not be modified at the regional level. At the secondary level, students are offered some optional courses, such as a foreign language, but must also complete the national curriculum.

France has a national assessment procedure. The Ministry of Education examines students on a regular basis to note their level of achievement. National assessment tests are given at the third year of elementary education, the end of lower secondary education, and the beginning of upper secondary education. Assessment is also achieved through monitoring of students' progress through the education system and their learning skills and social behavior in school.

The French education system has increasingly moved to some form of secondary level vocational education (from a system traditionally focused



exclusively on academics). Recent education reforms resulted in the extension of the *baccalauréat* to cover a wide range of vocational options in addition to the traditional general and technical subjects. France also offers an apprenticeship program for students over age sixteen, in which they learn a trade partly in employment under an apprenticeship trainer and partly in education institutions. Nearly all students who do not go on to university enter some form of vocational training.

### Contemporary Dynamics

During the 2007 presidential campaign, the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UPM) candidate Nicolas Sarkozy regularly emphasized an urgent need to reform France's higher education system. Early in that campaign, Sarkozy argued that it was time for France to address such controversial issues as university admissions criteria, tuition fees, and institutional autonomy. Failure to do so, he argued, would prevent French universities from competing on the global stage, and universities would continue to fall short of meeting France's economic needs and, in particular, its workforce demands. As the election neared, Sarkozy maintained his focus on higher education reform but pulled back from some of his earlier, more controversial positions (for example, support for tuition fees) and concentrated on what he thought would be less divisive issues, such as university governance and autonomy. At the time, France's centralized, state-centered, bureaucratic model was mirrored in its university system: all universities were public, all professors were civil servants, admissions were completely open, and the system was entirely publicly funded. In 2007 these institutions also were generally regarded as failures—no French university was found in the world's top forty, more than half of students dropped out after their first year, large numbers of those who continued after one year failed to earn a degree, and many of those who did graduate found themselves unprepared for the workforce. Hence, Sarkozy's claim that university reform was urgently needed seemed valid.

Upon taking office, and following through on his election pledges, Sarkozy declared higher education reform to be an "absolute priority" for his government's first year. The first major piece of legislation the prime minister, François Fillon, introduced to the parliament was on higher education. The proposed reform was designed to grant universities autonomy in spending, staffing decisions, and facilities management. As introduced, the proposal was bold and far reaching for a policy sector infamously opposed to change and very effective at obstructing reform.

The difficulties associated with enacting education reforms in France became apparent immediately after the reform's unveiling. The government was well aware of the typical response to the sort of reforms it was proposing: vociferous student and teachers' union resistance, usually leading to reform failure. The proposed legislation quickly drew intense criticism from student

groups, teachers' unions, and the opposition parties. Soon after the bill's introduction, the main student organization in the country threatened to unleash large-scale protests. As those opposed to the reforms were mustering their forces, President Sarkozy took an unusual approach to the reform process: he personally conducted negotiations with student unions, and as a result, several provisions of the draft law were amended or deleted entirely. The government clearly intended to avoid the pitfalls of past education reforms by trying to garner the support of key stakeholders through compromise and concessions before the law was approved.

Opposition to the bill focused on three issues. First, students were concerned that a proposal to allow universities to choose whether to operate more autonomously would create a two-tier higher education system. After extended parliamentary debate, the plan to introduce an autonomy option was delayed for five years. Second, the government planned to reduce the size of university governing boards from between thirty and sixty members to twenty. This reduction would have dramatically altered existing decision-making arrangements among students, academics, staff, and unions. In addition, outside groups, such as regional authorities and businesses, were to be included on the boards and given more influence, reflecting the president's intention to forge closer links among universities, the economy, and business. In talks with the president, a compromise of thirty members was reached (with increased student representation) that largely maintained the proportional influence of the various stakeholder groups. Third, students strongly objected to a provision to introduce admissions criteria for entry to master's-level programs. The first draft of the bill proposed to allow universities to select their master's students at the entry to the degree program, rather than between the first and second years of schooling, which was the standing practice. This provision was dropped from the bill entirely after the student unions met with the president.

The Law on the Autonomy and Responsibilities of Universities was enacted in August 2007, in part because even the most ardent opponents of the new law recognized that the country's higher education system was in dire need of reform. The law passed with solid majority support in the National Assembly on a vote of 165 to 46, with only the opposition Socialist, Green, and Communist parties voting against it. The final law achieved far more than earlier reform attempts, although its final version was noticeably less comprehensive than the government had intended. Not only did the Sarkozy government succeed in passing reform in a notoriously difficult policy sector, but it did so based on consensus among educators and students regarding the urgent need for the sort of reform the bill proposed. In this instance, the policy-making process proceeded quite differently than in the past. The government actively sought to negotiate and then make concessions before the law was voted on. The more traditional practice would have involved ignoring opposition during the parliamentary stage and then making concessions, or backing down entirely, at the implementation stage.

Even so, implementation of the 2007 law was not trouble-free. Reflecting the government's earlier concessions—and unusual for France in the aftermath of passage of a major education reform—large public demonstrations were *not* held following the bill's adoption. This was a notable achievement for the Sarkozy government. However, by April 2009 regular, albeit small, protests against the reform were commonplace. University professors objected to a range of new rules, such as requirements for regular performance reviews and the transfer of new powers to university presidents to hire, promote, and manage staff. Although the reforms did not involve tuition fees or admissions standards, students remain suspicious of any hint of competition or privatization of the universities, such as their new capacity to engage in private fundraising. Despite the concessions they received from the government when the law was being debated, these student groups remain wary of change. A number of trade unions and parent-teacher organizations, led by the university lecturers union, view the law as an attack on the basic right to education. The Socialist Party shared this view of the law when it was introduced and remains opposed to it. Nonetheless, implementation of the law has proceeded despite this general sense of uneasiness among key stakeholders.

The policy reform process in this instance clearly reveals the important role a unified governing party can play in enacting widespread reform. Strong leadership at the top, combined with a unified and disciplined parliamentary party at the time of this decision, enabled the government to successfully pursue a major reform in one of the country's most intractable policy areas. In the past, significant divisions within the governing coalitions meant that reform could not succeed. In addition, the president clearly learned from past experience: previous reforms failed because interest groups were able to block reforms they opposed, often first within the legislature and then on the streets. He attempted to forestall both stages of interest group activity by meeting and negotiating with key stakeholders—a strategy that was by and large successful. Finally, the success of this reform effort demonstrates the importance of political support within the parliamentary majority, key stakeholders, and the electorate at large. In the end, all were convinced that the time had come to engage in reform.

## **United Kingdom**

### **Background: Policy Process and Policy History**

The principle of decentralization is an important dimension of British education policy. More specifically, power has been decentralized in that individual local schools have been given more authority, and it has been centralized in that this reform has taken place within a framework of national evaluation and curriculum control. Both Margaret Thatcher's and John Major's governments supported a process of moving education authority from producers (that is, teachers and administrators) to consumers (parents and students).

Power in certain areas of education policy also is centralized through a mandatory national curriculum for core subjects and a set of nationally administered and determined tests. The national Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills establish and administer the statutory framework of the education system and establish national education policy, working with other central and local government bodies. The public sector predominates in British education (with attendance by over 90 percent of children), although the diversity of providers is growing. About 7 percent of children attend a variety of tuition-charging independent schools (or public schools). Independent schools are funded privately and are permitted to opt out of the national curriculum, although many conform to at least some of its guidelines. Since 1998 there have been four types of maintained schools: community schools (local authority controls the school), voluntary aided schools (almost always church schools with local authority control), voluntary controlled schools (fully in the hands of charitable organizations), and foundation schools. Foundation schools have been the focus of the Labour government: these are controlled by a governing body that employs the staff and makes admission decisions. The school land and buildings are owned by the governing body or by a charitable foundation. The foundation appoints a minority of governors. In 2005 the Labour government proposed allowing all schools to become foundation schools if they wished. The bulk of resources for education is generated at the central level, but expenditures generally take place at the local government level through local education authorities.

Education in the United Kingdom is compulsory from age five to age sixteen. The leaving age for compulsory education was raised to eighteen by the Education and Skills Act of 2008. The change will take effect in 2013 for seventeen-year-olds and in 2015 for eighteen-year-olds. In most localities, a two-tier system of primary and secondary schools operates, but some areas have a three-tier system of first, middle, and upper or high schools. Although the majority of schools are comprehensive, some areas also have grammar and secondary modern schools that cater specifically to children in the higher and lower ability ranges, respectively. Secondary schools specializing in particular subjects areas, such as technology or languages, have developed as well.

At the end of compulsory schooling, students may either enter a one- to two-year course of study in what is known as the sixth form of a school, or study at one of more than 450 further education colleges. These institutions offer three types of certificates: in education (A levels), broad-based vocational qualifications, or job-specific vocational qualifications in one- to two-year programs. Nearly one-third of students then go on to higher education.

All compulsory-age students in government-run (maintained) schools follow a national curriculum that is at the heart of a drive to improve standards and to provide a minimum entitlement for students. The curriculum involves twelve subjects, the core of which are mathematics, science, and English. The

curriculum was established under the 1988 Education Reform Act and was revised and scaled back in January 1995 in response to complaints that it was far too comprehensive and consequently unmanageable. The curriculum began changing again after 2000. The biggest modification—requiring citizenship as a foundation subject in secondary schools—was enacted in September 2002.

Formal assessment of students with national testing begins at age seven and is followed up at ages eleven and fourteen. These assessment points correspond to the end of key stages in the national curriculum. At ages sixteen and eighteen, several public examinations (the General Certificate of Secondary Education and the A levels) are the main assessment instruments. The government also planned to introduce nationwide baseline assessment and testing for five-year-olds in 1997. The introduction of such tests has been highly contentious, with the tests criticized for a lack of integrity and their hurried introduction. The government has since reviewed and modified the testing process, although the policy of nationwide tests has not been abandoned.

Vocational education has yet to be addressed in a comprehensive manner in the United Kingdom. The country offers no vocational alternative to the academic course at the secondary level. Government education policy also plans for all sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds not in full-time education to be in training or in a job, preferably with training. A system of youth credits gives all sixteen- and seventeen-year-old dropouts access to a Modern Apprenticeships and Youth Training program. Limited attention has been paid to making vocational courses available to students who choose not to pursue academic courses after age sixteen, but this is not yet a systematic effort.

### Contemporary Dynamics

As elsewhere, the drive for education reform in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and early 1990s began with a sense that the education system was failing to prepare students for new economic challenges. Education policy reform arrived on the institutional agenda in the United Kingdom as a result of pressures similar to those observed in the other industrialized countries. In particular, the move to reform reflected a belief that the education system was not up to challenges presented by increasing international economic competition. Such competition from abroad generated a belief that increased education system effectiveness needed to be achieved through an emphasis on standards and performance. Efficiency, competition, performance, and quality became important reform keywords.

In 1997 the Labour Party campaigned under the leadership of Tony Blair on an education platform—“education, education, education” was the party’s central campaign motto. The education theme continued to play a prominent role in the party’s 2001 and 2005 general election campaigns. From the outset, the Blair government pursued an aggressive education policy reform agenda that emphasized choice, competition, autonomy, and efficiency. The earliest

Blair education reforms were targeted at primary level schooling, with far less activity at the secondary and tertiary levels. The Blair government inherited a higher education system confronted by a number of serious challenges—decreasing public funding, increasing student numbers, rising costs, and growing pressure to respond to the demands of a competitive global economy. Although higher education reform had been on the institutional agenda in the United Kingdom since the mid-1990s, the Blair government did not turn its full attention to higher education reform until its second term, in 2001.

The number of students enrolled in British universities began to increase in the late 1980s—doubling between 1987 and 1997—without a commensurate increase in the level of funding. This situation contributed to a growing sense that the country was faced with a higher education crisis. In response, in 1996 the Conservative-controlled government formed a Commission of Inquiry charged with making recommendations about higher education's role, organization, and funding into the twenty-first century. To address the funding crisis, the commission recommended that university students be responsible for a portion of the cost of their education, when they could afford to do so. The prospect of changing the system of cost-free education generated considerable debate within the Labour Party, traditionally the party most strongly in favor of free public education at all levels. Reflecting the divisions within the party over this issue, and despite serious objections in some quarters, the Blair government in 1997 opted to move only a small portion of the costs of university education to students via an up-front tuition fee (of around 1,100 pounds).

Amidst great controversy, the Blair government's position on fees began to change during its second term. The small up-front fees introduced in 1997 had proven insufficient to address the crisis presented by rising higher education costs and insufficient funding, and, as a result, the government moved further in the direction of full-blown tuition fees. In 2004 the government introduced to parliament a higher education bill. Consistent with a 2003 white paper on higher education, but in direct contradiction to the party's 2001 election manifesto and then-education minister David Blunkett's 2001 pledge that there would be no levying of university fees in the next parliament, the bill's main provision was the introduction of variable tuition fees of up to 3,000 pounds beginning in 2006. To generate additional revenues, the new fees would provide each university with some freedom to price their own courses as they saw fit, based on what they thought the market would bear. At the time, the cost of higher education was the same at all British universities, regardless of quality. Under provisions of the new bill, some universities would charge more than others, but no more than the 3,000 pound cap. Reflecting his belief that market policies could and should be applied to the higher education sector in the interest of promoting greater efficiency, competition, and autonomy, Blair argued that the price of degrees should vary across universities according to their cost and their value to the student. The introduction of fees

was to be accompanied by a system of deferred student loans (no student would be required to pay fees up front) and means-tested grants.

The parliamentary approval process for the bill involved the greatest controversy the Blair government had faced thus far and constituted a real challenge to the government's authority. There was intense opposition to the bill within the parliamentary Labour Party. Upon the bill's introduction, nearly 160 Labour members of Parliament signed a Commons motion opposing the bill. The motion was partly a reflection of these members' strong opposition to tuition fees in principle, but it also was a reaction to the prime minister's position on the Iraq war, which made the fees vote potentially a referendum on Blair's leadership. Labour members of Parliament were unhappy with fees for a variety of reasons. Some members fundamentally opposed any sort of fee and favored increasing taxes to fund education; others argued that having to accrue debt to attend university would scare off poor students; others accepted the idea of fees but did not like the variability aspect, fearing the eventual creation of an education marketplace. Across these groups, many Labour members of Parliament resented being asked to vote for a policy that had been ruled out explicitly in the party manifesto, and members sitting in marginal seats feared electoral retribution from Labour voters most affected by the fees. Overall, for many Labour members of Parliament, the idea of tuition fees deeply contradicted fundamental party principles.

In the face of this dissension in the party, the prime minister described the legislation as "a very major flagship reform" from which "there will be absolutely no retreat." He added, "of course my authority is on the line." He did not, however, back down from his commitment to the bill, confident, as ever, in his ability to persuade his party to stand by him at the bill's final vote. Public opinion polls showed that large majorities of the population were opposed to the fees. The Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties also were opposed. The Tories thought the funding crisis could be resolved by simply cutting student numbers, whereas the Liberal Democrats advocated levying higher taxes on the rich.

The bill passed through its second reading in the Commons by just five votes (the overall Labour majority was 161 seats). Opponents continued to work against the measure through its final reading in March 2004. After intensive lobbying of Labour members of Parliament by the education minister, Charles Clarke, and Labour whips, the bill passed with only a slight margin—just twenty-eight votes. In the end, the vote was not a referendum on Blair's leadership. Some members realized that voting against Blair would make the party appear incapable of governing, and others decided they did not want to remove him from office. Thus the prime minister survived the biggest backbench rebellion of his government, and his funding reform bill became law as the Higher Education Act of 2004. Despite high levels of dissatisfaction among students about the new charges, implementation of the law proceeded without any impediments.

The Blair government's achievement in enacting variable tuition fees was significant. Although passage of the law was more difficult than one would typically anticipate in this majority-party system, in the face of considerable parliamentary party opposition, the government ultimately was able to secure enough votes to enact a major change in higher education policy. The nature of the reform itself is significant because (1) it was a first step away from a fully publicly funded higher education system, and (2) for the first time it introduced the possibility of competition between institutions. As such, it created the possibility that future governments will give universities even more autonomy and move the higher education sector closer to market mechanisms. As we have observed elsewhere, the principles of autonomy, efficiency, and competition played a significant role in shaping the content of higher education reform in the United Kingdom.

## Italy

### Background: Policy Process and Policy History

The Italian government's central Ministry of Education, University and Research supervises and coordinates all education activities carried out in the country by public and private institutions. The ministry governs curriculum and syllabus changes and administers budgetary activities and school staffing decisions. Regional governments oversee school building and maintenance, the management of vocational education, the provision of training, specialization and teacher requalification, and counseling and guidance services. Provinces provide equipment, services, and nonteaching staff to schools; and local councils manage services necessary for running schools in their own areas. Education is funded primarily at the central level (90.5 percent of education expenditures). The remainder is covered by regions, provinces, and municipalities.

This pattern reflects the traditional Italian view that education should be controlled and financed by national government. Since the early 1990s, however, the issue of control has been debated. There has been a strong movement for local autonomy and increased input in running schools by those most involved in education—parents, students, and teachers. Although most Italians still want education to be funded at the central level, a more clearly defined and rigorous curriculum is desired, and many Italians believe that this goal can be achieved only through more local control. This perceived need for a more open and participatory structure has been the subject of tremendous debate, yet nothing has been resolved. Italy may eventually move to a greater, but not complete, level of autonomy in which the central government funds education and sets standards for and monitors outcomes, while local schools adapt national mandates to local needs and take advantage of local resources.

Education in Italy is compulsory for all children aged six to sixteen. Compulsory education is divided into primary and lower secondary schools, with



98 percent of the relevant age groups enrolled. More than 80 percent of students continue their education for four to five additional years in a variety of secondary school types: general education, elementary teachers' training schools, technical education with different specializations, vocational education for various working activities fields, or fine arts institutes and schools. Nearly three-fourths of secondary school graduates go on to some form of postsecondary education, either in vocational programs or some form of university. Graduates of general education and five-year vocational schools are qualified for university entrance.

Italian students are given the option of enrolling in any Italian school, even in a district in which they do not live or pay property taxes. To inform students' and parents' choices, individual schools are asked to make available information about their education programs. The issue of vouchers recently made it onto the education policy agenda in Italy, with some supporters advocating their use for Catholic and private schools. Not surprisingly, the Catholic schools and other private schools have been especially strong advocates of vouchers, rather than Italian parents more generally, given that Italian students already have the option of choosing to attend any public school.

The Italian government supports a common national curriculum in the interests of promoting Italian culture and providing education equity for all students. The national minister of education enacts national curricular programs approved by the parliament and gives approval for experimental curricula in selected schools. An elementary school curriculum implemented in 1990 emphasized new teaching methods, more disciplinary-based teaching, and the teaching of a foreign language from grade 3 onward. The middle school curriculum has been in place since 1979.

National examinations are administered in Italy at the lower secondary level, where students are tested in all subjects. Students passing the examinations receive a certificate that is required for admission to the upper secondary level. There also are national periodical assessments for lower secondary programs, but schools are not required to administer these tests. These assessments are of limited utility, however, because performance feedback to schools is minimal, although the results of examinations are made public.

Important reforms were made in technical and vocational education in Italy in the 1990s. Significant reform has been made in the technical institutes to prepare young people adequately for future employment. Post-diploma courses were introduced for higher professional qualifications, and vocational institutes also underwent curriculum reform. In the last two years of the five-year vocational course, some teaching hours are now devoted to job-training activities under the responsibility of the regions. This reform is intended to result in a broader basic education that is followed by vocational training. In addition, a diploma in all languages of the EU was created for students who successfully complete a three-year course after compulsory schooling, to increase their job mobility.

## Contemporary Dynamics

Among the six countries examined in this book, Italy has spent the least amount of time engaged in education reform in the contemporary era. By the late 1990s, only two landmark education reforms had been enacted in Italy, the 1859 Casati law, which created the existing education system, and a major reform undertaken in 1923, the Gentile reform. Other important but smaller reforms have been undertaken since then, such as the introduction of a single middle school curriculum in 1962 and the opening of higher education to universal access in 1969. Although calls for more substantial reforms were issued regularly, consensus about how to approach such reforms was lacking to such a large degree that most Italians talked about the impossibility of reform when it came to education matters. Thus the basic shape of the education system in Italy remained largely unchanged throughout most of the twentieth century. This lack of change should not be taken as an indication of widespread satisfaction, however. On the contrary, Italians have increasingly recognized that their students perform at lower levels than students in other industrialized countries. As a result, since the 1980s pressure has continued to mount for the government to initiate reforms to raise the skill levels of students about to enter the workforce. These concerns were strongly related to concerns about Italy's ability to increase its economic competitiveness both within the EU and internationally.

By the end of the last century, the absence of comprehensive education reform had become especially problematic in higher education. Over a thirty-year period (1965–1995), Italian universities experienced a fourfold increase in the size of their student populations. This tremendous growth was not accompanied by any meaningful change in the structure of the university system, nor by funding increases. Although multiple higher education reform laws had been proposed since 1960s, none made it to a final vote in the parliament. These reform failures were partly a byproduct of persistent government instability but also reflected the presence of a mobilized and effective academic community that wields considerable political clout and is perennially opposed to change. By the late 1990s, the Italian higher education system was perceived to be in desperate need of reform. Among the long-standing problems confronting Italian universities were rigid ministerial control over curricula, financing, and degrees and the common view that institutions were inefficient and ineffective. These perceptions were supported by many objective indicators: at the end of the last century, Italy ranked near the top of industrialized countries in dropout rates and near the bottom in employment rates for graduates.

In 1999 Romano Prodi's center-left government formed an ad hoc group of academics (known as Gruppo Martinotti, after the director, Guido Martinotti) to discuss guidelines for higher education reform. University rectors and other academics were asked to directly inform the drafting of higher education reform legislation. The reform process was given added

momentum and definition by the Bologna Process initiatives that recently had been drafted at the European level. The government seized on the Bologna Process as one impetus for higher education reform and also as a source for guidance in framing the content of the reform. This collaborative and inclusive approach at the policy development stage, combined with a widely shared view that the higher education system was in urgent need of reform, allowed the Prodi government to quickly propose and pass comprehensive education reform in the legislature without extensive debate. This was a marked break from patterns of education policy making in Italy. The approved laws were intended to reduce dropout rates, to reduce the average duration of university study, to improve the employability conditions for university degree holders, and to make graduates competitive in both domestic and global labor markets. The laws were implemented through a series of ministerial decrees that went into effect in the 2000–2001 academic year.

The speed and ease with which the law was passed, as well as the absence of a full public vetting of the proposed law, may explain, at least in part, the controversy that emerged during the implementation phase of the reform decrees. Supporters (namely, business and academic leaders who had been involved in the early phase of the reform process) argued that the new policies would lead the Italian system toward European standards, in particular with respect to efficiency. They also were keenly aware of the need for modernization and fully supported the reform's implementation. However, the majority of Italian academics below the administrative level (who had not been included in the reform process) strongly resisted the new reforms. In the main, they objected to moving toward what they viewed as the Anglo-Saxon model for organizing teaching and curriculum that was suggested by the Bologna Process. In their view, such a model would reduce the overall quality of Italian degrees. In addition, for many, a degree program designed largely to improve students' employability signaled the cultural decline of the Italian university system. Despite their strong objections, Italian academics were not powerful enough as a group to stop the reform in the implementation stage. In the end, implementation of the reform was accomplished because of the government's early consultation with university rectors on the content of the reform. The leadership of the academic community was persuaded that the university system had to change, and they were comfortable with the reform and especially with the education minister, who was a former rector himself. In this instance, all the conditions were in place for this reform to be accepted widely and implemented quickly.

In Italy the movement for education policy reform was driven by concerns about global competition and demands for a more flexible and highly skilled workforce and by a belief that students were less well educated than in the past. Additional pressures came from European-level imperatives. By including members of the education establishment in the policy formulation process, and by incorporating their criticisms and concerns into the policy

proposal, the Italian government hoped to avoid much of the opposition from strong education interest groups that traditionally hindered the adoption and implementation of reforms. In the past, needed reforms failed to advance in Italy because consensus about how to approach reform was consistently lacking. In this instance, the government established a consensus among educational leaders about reform in the early phase of the policy process. This proved to be an effective strategy not only for passing the reform legislation but also for implementing it.

## European Union

### Background: Policy Process and Policy History

EU member states have traditionally viewed education policy as an area reserved for national decision makers. This orientation continues into the contemporary period. Primary responsibility for education policy remains with the member states in both the Treaty on European Union and in the draft Constitutional Treaty. As such, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture has a limited legal basis and few financial resources. The Commission has sought greater harmonization in this policy area, but its efforts have been resisted.

This resistance notwithstanding, the Commission has steadily extended its reach in education policy over the past fifty years. Although education policy is not a clearly defined EU competency, a set of emerging political objectives can be identified that guide the EU's activities with respect to higher education in particular that constitute a genuine EU policy framework in this sector. Although this framework complements rather than competes with national policies, in recent years the EU has had a substantial impact on national higher education policy making. No similar initiatives have been undertaken with respect to other educational levels.

Early on, the EU focused its educational activities on vocational training and defining professional qualifications. Its initiatives in this area were accepted because they were deemed necessary to facilitate the free movement of workers for the common internal market. In 1987 the EU introduced the ERASMUS student mobility initiative, which expanded the EU's influence over higher education with respect to university networking and credit transfers. The ERASMUS scholarship program has supported well over a million European students studying outside their European home countries. More recently, two European-level policy developments, the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process, have had a more noticeable influence on higher education policy reform within the member states. Although neither policy initiative provides a mandate for EU action in higher education, both have allowed the Commission to assert itself in national higher education policy arenas with considerable success. Today, in most member states, national higher education policies increasingly conform to the standards laid out in these plans. The

Bologna Process in particular has initiated profound changes in higher education systems across Europe and beyond, with the net result being marked uniformity across systems, as if an EU mandate had existed. These reforms have been initiated by national governments, but most of the policies proposed clearly reflect the Bologna standards. In effect, an EU education policy framework does exist.

Since 2000 the European Commission has developed its higher education policy portfolio beyond Bologna and Lisbon and has noticeably increased its European higher education profile. This is particularly true in the area of research, where the Commission has pushed for a European Research Council, advocated strongly for greater emphasis on research on a European scale, and sought to provide financial support for research endeavors. All told, we observe an increasingly central role for the European Commission's policy statements on education in shaping the higher education discourse across member states. In many countries, political leaders have found the EU's objectives for higher education to be a useful impetus and framework for reforms.

### Contemporary Dynamics

In 1999 nothing resembling a European common market in education existed. Across European countries, degree programs were incompatible, credits did not transfer easily, and student mobility in both education and labor markets was constrained. In addition, dropout rates were high, and many students took longer than average time to complete their studies. Further, across European countries there were serious concerns about the declining quality of higher education relative to the rest of the world.

The 1999 Bologna Process is a Europe-wide commitment to restructuring European higher education systems that emerged in response to these concerns. The Bologna Process is officially nothing more than a declaration of shared higher education goals. It is not EU law, and it does not involve formally binding obligations. The name derives from the June 1999 meeting in Bologna, Italy, at which the higher education ministers of thirty-nine European countries met to declare their intention to construct a "European Higher Education Area" by 2010 that would resemble a common market. This area would be characterized by "greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education." The ministers hoped to see the implementation of a common higher education structure across the agreement's signatory countries. The primary objective of the Bologna Process is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of undergraduate and postgraduate university teaching. To this end, Bologna calls for curricular harmonization, as well as convergence in the structure and length of study for university degrees. These changes, it was believed, would result in more efficient higher education institutions, lowered dropout rates, and increased mobility for students and researchers.

Policy making at the Bologna meetings was intergovernmental, but this agreement did not result in a treaty or binding EU law. Bologna is notable as a European initiative because it extends beyond EU countries; as such, the agreement was clearly outside formal EU policy-making processes, although the European Commission played an important role at the Bologna meetings. Although the Bologna Process is not official EU policy and did not evolve via normal EU policy-making channels, it is considered here as EU policy because its impact on higher educational systems across the EU has been notable.

Although European political leaders welcomed the Bologna Process as an impetus for higher education reforms that had been stalled for decades, students across Europe have been unhappy with the changes it has encouraged in their countries' higher education systems. In France and Italy, for example, student protesters decried the adoption of an Anglo-Saxon educational model. In these countries and others, many students and professors also objected to, in their view, Bologna's emphasis on education for employability, rather than learning for learning's sake.

Although often the source of great controversy in European countries, implementation of the Bologna Process turned out to be more successful than would probably have been anticipated in 1999. The Process's reform agenda has been implemented in a decentralized manner, with each signatory country proceeding as it sees fit at the national level. However, its implementation has been closely monitored and advanced since 1999 by European-level reports, conferences, and communications, which were formally structured around biennial meetings of ministers financed by the European Commission. These meetings function as a system of monitored cooperation, involving regular reporting, troubleshooting, and developing follow-up mechanisms. This regular, formal interaction between the signatory states has produced a sense of obligation among them and maintained their commitment to the process. Despite fierce resistance in some quarters, by 2007 nearly three-quarters of Bologna Process participants had over 60 percent of students enrolled in courses of study compatible with the new degree structure recommended at Bologna.

As of 2009, forty-six European countries had committed to the Bologna Process—twenty-seven from the EU and nineteen other countries, including Russia and Turkey. Representatives of these countries met in Leuven in April 2009 to declare the Bologna Process a success. With few exceptions, higher education systems do constitute a "European Higher Education Area," and universities across Europe now adhere to a European credit transfer system, standardized diploma supplements that detail what students have learned, and a common degree structure. One of the major achievements of Bologna is the structure of curriculum. Most European higher education systems have abandoned their traditional degree structures, where students earned a degree in four or five years, to a three-year bachelor's and two-year master's degree

curriculum. In short, despite the nonharmonizing, nonregulating, intergovernmental nature of the Bologna Process, it became the most powerful force for change in higher education public policy across Europe. Today, nearly all European countries are playing the Bologna Process game.

## **Cross-national Trends**

In reviewing the broader cross-national trends in these six countries, we consider here the choices these countries have made with respect to education provision and how well their education systems have performed in terms of access to education and student achievement. All six countries have engaged to varying degrees in education policy reforms in recent years, with a pattern of mixed results regarding students' access to education and their education achievements.

### **Policy Outputs**

Among the industrialized countries examined in this book, most have been engaged in an ongoing process of education reform since the 1990s or earlier. Cross-national variation exists in the degree of interest in changing the control, administration, financing, and evaluation of education systems, but generally all countries have addressed at least some, if not all, of these issues. These countries have made a variety of choices, ranging from creating more centralized control systems to ones that are highly decentralized to a mixture of the two, and from systems based on loose education standard frameworks to rigid systems of national curriculum control. In most countries, the reform process also has included a focus on evaluating and creating education standards and improving assessment tools to respond to the public's demand for greater education accountability and productivity.

In these countries, education reforms have been directed toward some or all of the following: improving quality and efficiency, monitoring students' progress more comprehensively and systematically, closing the gap between standards and actual learning, and, for some countries, improving vocational training and managing the transition from work to school. Included in their reforms in the 1990s have been curriculum revisions, standardized and centralized testing, and new approaches to school governance, with an increased emphasis on market-based mechanisms. The most comprehensive reforms have been undertaken in the United Kingdom and the United States (through the introduction of new policy instruments in nearly all these areas). The other four countries have tinkered with various aspects of education provision but avoided dramatic, wholesale change.

Another area of policy outputs involves education spending in these six countries. In all areas of education, the United States spends more than

**Table 10-1** Expenditures per Student in Public and Private Institutions, 2005

Country	Annual Expenditure per Student (in equivalent U.S. dollars)		
	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education
France	\$5,365	\$8,927	\$10,995
Germany	5,014	7,636	12,446
Italy	6,835	7,648	8,026
Japan	6,744	7,908	12,326
United Kingdom	6,361	7,167	13,506
United States	9,156	10,390	24,370

SOURCE: Center for Educational Research and Innovation (2008).

**Table 10-2** Educational Expenditures as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Country	Direct Public Expenditure for Educational Institutions (percentage of GDP)		
	1995	2000	2005
France	6.6%	6.4%	6.0%
Germany	5.4	5.1	5.1
Italy	4.8	4.8	4.7
Japan	5.0	5.1	4.9
United Kingdom	5.2	5.0	6.2
United States	6.6	7.0	7.1

SOURCE: Center for Educational Research and Innovation (2008).

most other industrialized countries. At the primary and secondary levels, U.S. expenditures per pupil are among the highest of the OECD countries. As Table 10-1 indicates, the United States outspent the other five countries at both public and private primary and secondary levels per pupil in 2005, especially for primary education. At all levels, the United States spent more than the other five countries. If we consider government education expenditures as a percentage of GDP (Table 10-2), the United States also spends more than all the other countries. By 2005, OECD countries were spending 6.1 percent of their collective GDP on education at all levels (Center for Educational Research and Innovation 2008: 2). Overall, the United States spent a higher percentage of GDP on education than the other five countries (National Center for Education Statistics 2009: vi). From 2000 to 2005, public spending on education rose in the United States and the United Kingdom, decreased in France, and remained stable in Germany, Italy, and Japan (Center for Educational Research and Innovation 2008: 13). Notably, though, from 1995 to 2005, public expenditure on education as a proportion of all public spending grew in all countries except France. In these countries, spending on education rose at least as fast as public spending in other sectors.



## Policy Outcomes

How do countries compare with respect to education outcomes? If one were to assume that higher spending translates automatically into better quality education, then one would expect the quality of U.S. education to be especially high. On the issue of access to education, the United States is performing fairly well. Enrollment in primary education in the United States in 2006 was at the median level for high-income economies; enrollment in the United States is basically universal, as it is in most industrialized countries. Enrollment in upper secondary education is now the norm in the industrialized countries examined in this book. In Japan and Germany, over 90 percent of students were enrolled in and graduated from upper secondary education in 2006. The figures for the United States in 2006 were slightly below the OECD average due to higher dropout rates.

In higher education, the United States' emphasis on access has shown the most tangible results: enrollment rates in the United States were about twice the median level found in other industrialized countries (Center for Educational Research and Innovation 2008: 217). Although higher education is also accessible to increasing numbers of people in all industrialized countries, considerable variations in participation rates are observed from country to country. The greater use of postsecondary education in the United States stems from an emphasis on general education at the secondary level. The one-track system used in the United States leads to higher enrollments in postsecondary education in two ways. First, more U.S. students meet the entrance requirements to go to universities and colleges. Second, because high schools have fewer vocational programs, students who want a vocational degree or certificate often pursue that training at the postsecondary level. Italy again performs poorly relative to the other countries in higher education participation.

Although the United States has done well in providing access to education, the performance of the system (as measured by student scores on achievement tests) has been decidedly mixed. The 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, which measures reading levels in students' fourth year of formal study, found reading literacy in the United States unchanged from 2001 but above the international average. The United States ranked fourteenth among the forty countries studied, behind Italy and Germany, but ahead of Italy and France (Japan does not participate in this study). In science and mathematics, students from the United States have not fared well in cross-national studies. In a variety of studies from the 1970s through the early 2000s, the average U.S. student performed at or, more often, considerably below the median for other industrialized countries. Also, in most studies, the top U.S. students did not perform in math and science as well as the best students in other countries. The 2007 Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) showed some improvement for U.S. students since 1995

for math scores (to above the TIMSS average) but no movement in science (still below the average). Of the countries considered in this book, Japanese students placed highest in both math and science. Significantly, students with the best exam performances were from countries that tended to have education systems based on mandatory national curricula and testing.

Cross-national comparisons suggest that increased spending on education is not a foolproof solution to improving education outcomes. Money can help, but it is not a cure-all. The United States, like other countries, finds itself pressed to engage in education reform in an environment characterized by declining resources, rising expectations, and limited consensus. In all countries, such factors are simultaneously incentives for and barriers to meaningful reform.

### Understanding Policy Reform

Reflecting on the case studies, we see that these industrialized countries have come to recognize that they no longer can maintain their global economic status through mass production because low labor costs in late-industrializing countries allow them to engage in mass production for a fraction of the cost in industrialized countries. Thus, for these richer industrialized countries, the primary remaining economic niche is found in employment sectors that require highly skilled, well-educated workers. In large part, recognition of this economic situation initially pushed the movement for education reform in these countries. This recognition especially fueled the return to the basics, and the increased emphasis on curriculum content and accountability. These reform efforts reflect a widespread interest in producing a more highly skilled and technologically competent workforce. Because these driving forces for reform remain, policymakers likely will continue to be confronted with pressure for significant education change, regardless of the results of their ongoing reforms.

Citizens in industrialized countries have increasingly come to view education systems, correctly or incorrectly, as being ineffective. A widely held opinion in many settings is that education standards either have fallen or have not been set sufficiently high. As a result, the focus of education reform has switched from inputs (such as financing) to outcome control (especially through greater emphasis on curriculum and testing). Popular concern and dissatisfaction with the education system have been high in all countries. Noticeable levels of citizen concern are partly the result of cross-national comparisons of student performance (usually based on standardized exam results). For example, although German and Japanese students tended to score much higher than students from other industrialized countries on such exams, falling test scores in recent years have resulted in the population's having a stronger sense of education failure. As a result, the pressure for comprehensive education reform has increased in these countries. Strong pressure for

reforms also is related to economic conditions: countries facing economic difficulties are more likely to pursue significant education restructuring than are those in relatively good economic shape. This relationship was evident in all of the countries examined here, as economic downturns produced significant impetus for intensive education reform.

Education reforms also are related to a return to market-based mechanisms and individualistic orientations in many industrialized countries. As governments began to emphasize the virtues of privatization, decentralization, deregulation, and market forces, these principles began to be applied outside the sphere of economic systems. As dissatisfaction with education performance emerged in these countries, these more liberal political values provided ready solutions to many areas of concern. In the United Kingdom, Japan, and France, we see a clear example of this pattern of influence, as school autonomy and non-public-funding policies were ardently pursued.

Education policy implementation was no easy task in any of the countries examined in this book, but it proved especially difficult in the less centralized political systems. In all six countries, implementation was impeded by the broad number of participants involved and the power of entrenched education bureaucracies. Education systems offer multiple points at which opponents of prior policy decisions can attempt to change the course of those policies. This is especially true in political systems where the control of education remains firmly in the hands of lower levels of government, as in the United States and Germany. In these countries, the passage of reforms was not enough to effect widespread change because powerful interests at the implementation stage were able to exercise their clout. In contrast, in Japan, where the entire education system is controlled tightly by the education bureaucracy, implementation was of far less concern. The experience of these six countries implies that dramatic policy changes are more difficult to achieve in this policy area because an extensive array of interests (many of whom control the systems that are the targets of reform) have a stake in preventing innovation from occurring and had the means to do so. This is not to say that change is impossible, however. The experiences of Italy and France, in which the policy-making process emphasized consensus among the major actors early on, may yet teach the industrialized countries a valuable lesson.

Our focus in this chapter has been on ongoing efforts to reform education systems. Given where most countries are in the reform process, the next step for these countries is to evaluate the effects of these reforms and proceed from there. The industrialized countries will continue to face pressures for further reform because of ongoing concern about being competitive in the global economic system. Many parents, students, politicians, and business people continue to feel that their countries' education systems are not capable of addressing new economic challenges, in particular the demand for better educated and more highly skilled workers.

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