

Foreword

Dr. Rudy Crew

The political and ideological tension surrounding public education has created a division with dramatic consequences for children and families in America. Can American education be the much-heralded anchor of our democracy? What will it take to make it competitive again? What will it take to transform urban schools so that children with fragile beginnings in life are given the quality of teaching and access to schooling and career networks so vital to their future?

These are questions that beg for clarity, passion, and direction. More importantly, these are times when strategy is more important than philosophy and direction more critical than the endless pandering from Republicans and Democrats along ideological lines. The simple fact is, schooling in America—public, private, and otherwise—is in need of a reasoned, thoughtful, less vitriolic, and more strategic voice from the White House to the classroom to the kitchen table.

Peter Cookson's *Sacred Trust* is a must-read for anyone who wants to go beyond simplistic answers to the deeper work and the less sexy conversations. What an opportunity the Obama administration had to exhort parenting skills and the connections to preschool education. What an opportunity to speak to the arts communities and instigate the creation of new settings where all students get another tool by which to make meaning of science, math, language, and technology. And dare we mention that leadership, teaching, and parenting need desperately to be elevated beyond the rancorous debate about unions, teacher accountability, and the endless search for superman, or anyone else whose newness on the scene suggests he or she can teach or lead. It is the worst of times for those of us who live in this work, bent but not broken by the absence of a Sacred Trust for our children and the devaluing of the profession of teaching.

In my career, I have seen significant numbers of people who care deeply, in fact, profoundly, about the issues of poverty, youth employability, and education. But caring is not enough. I have listened to people whose vision reflects growing up through the years of “all children can learn” and the powerful speeches of Asa Hilliard, Marva Collins, Jaime Escalante, and so many more. But vision, while necessary, is not sufficient either. We need vision, skill, strategy, and partnership to carry the day for the children of the 21st century. Such is the work contained in this book.

Peter Cookson is so good at bringing each of these into focus in *Sacred Trust: A Children's Education Bill of Rights*. First, we need a big idea. These are big problems with a historical footprint and an even larger future impact. We need big thinking about not how much to invest in public education, but where and for how long and with what return. We need partners who see the inextricable linkage between skill development, preparation, and employability of our young people in cities across the nation. We need internships where students routinely learn the art of being civic-minded, responsible, and ethical for a country's or corporate bottom line; where by middle school they speak a second language, have knowledge of their career interests, and see firsthand the relationship between the use of participles and the presentations they will make in their chosen career. We need corporations, businesses (small and large), who sign on to the notion that America's economic might is as much tied to its education system in their own town or city as it is to the trade agreements hammered out in Washington, D.C.

We have yet to begin these conversations. Instead, we are watching the issues of privatization, union bashing, and the devaluing of the profession of teaching take place. We are watching the rise of an anti-intellectualism of American education, whether in urban or more affluent communities. Indeed, we should be both ashamed and afraid. We are not making it easy for our children to function or fit in a world economy.

At a time when we should be looking for ways by which to support deeper classroom instruction, higher-level assessments, and stronger leadership, we are privatizing schools as though people in the field of education are incapable of doing the work that Dr. Cookson has outlined in his book. Moreover, there is no evidence that any of these ideas for charter school structures have delivered any better outcome in terms of student performance in the past decade. Peter is right! We need to define and create a new architecture, ensuring the access of all children to world-class 21st-century curriculum and technology. He is right when he talks about eliminating boredom. He is right to be talking about elevating teaching, ways in which we can treat teachers as the scholars they can be.

In all, this book is in the strike zone of all people who believe that public education is inextricably tied to the recovery of America. I am very glad that the thoughts in this book mirror my own and that Peter spared no opportunity to address the strategy needs of teachers and principals in our public schools and the communities they serve. We have all been called upon to leave our children a better world than it was for us. *Sacred Trust* is a powerful start in that direction.