

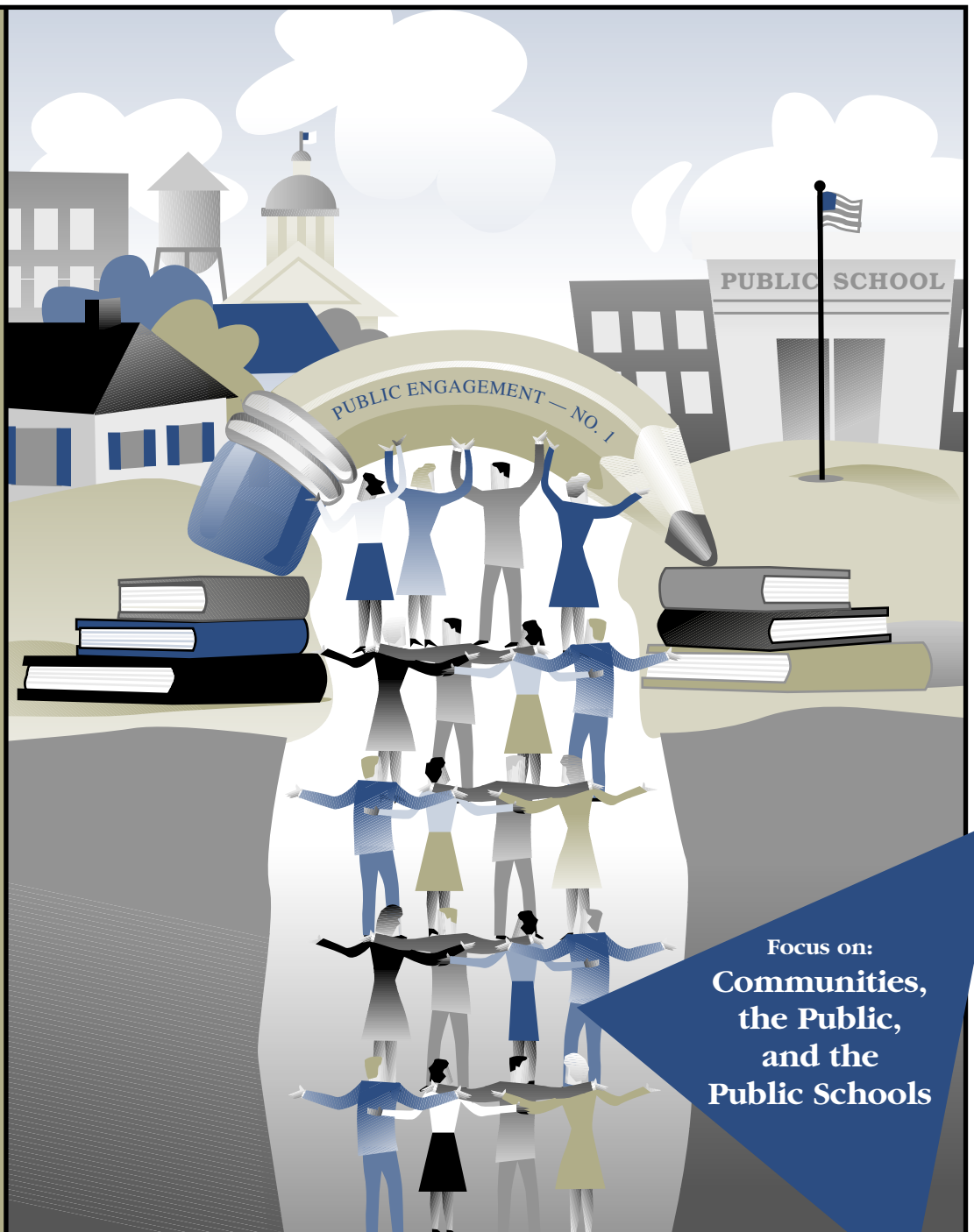
CONNECTIONS

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Focus on:
Communities,
the Public,
and the
Public Schools

The Holmes Partnership

by Robert Yinger and Amanda Nolen

In 1996, the Holmes Group board of directors took a rare step for a organization of educators: it voted itself out of existence. This action was in response to a comprehensive assessment of ten years of work produced by the Holmes Group, later published as *The Rise and Stall of Teacher Education Reform* (Fullan, et al, 1998).

That assessment had reached a blunt conclusion. It reported that of the nearly one hundred prestigious universities that committed themselves to the ambitious teacher education reform agenda of the Holmes Partnership, only a handful had made real progress. All participating universities had agreed with Holmes' assertion that the reform of teacher education was crucial to meeting the challenges of the *A Nation at Risk* report that assessed the state of U. S. public education in 1983. Most schools of education had, however, found it nearly impossible to reform their own operations. The common denominator among those universities that had shown some success was the establishment of serious partnerships with local school districts, teacher associations, and community organizations.

This finding was key to reestablishing the Holmes Group as the Holmes Partnership. The board that oversaw the transition committed itself to the idea that true reform in teacher education required schools of education to partner with local school districts, creating initiatives that combined change in teacher education with teacher professional development in school settings that focused on promoting student achievement. One signature effort that followed from this goal was the creation of professional development schools (PDSs). These were schools reorganized and staffed to become high-quality clinical education settings for teachers and school leaders, playing in education a similar role to teaching hospitals in medical education. To become a member of the nascent Holmes Partnership in 1996, a university was required to join with at least one school district partner.

By 2000, the 75 or so Holmes Partnership local partnerships faced unanticipated challenges. Some were internal to university culture; for example, the difficulty of making fundamental changes to faculty work expectations and to the reward structures that valued traditional academic scholarship above practical engagement in schools. Further, Holmes did not foresee that the fairly frequent leadership turnover in both universities and public schools would make it difficult to sustain long-term reforms.

The most significant challenges, however, were changes in educational policy-making and funding. The first was a general shift from local to state control. As school districts in the 1990s were unable to raise the necessary funds from local property taxes, the share of funds coming from the state rose. Increased state funding brought with it the institution of state accountability systems relying on state curriculum standards and student testing. Another change was a simultaneous worsening teacher shortage, especially in the South and West. Faced with that shortage, states began to create alternative paths to teacher certification. In many states, university teacher educators faced a new reality: they no longer held the exclusive franchise for educating teachers. The alternative programs, promising "fewer barriers" to becoming a teacher, were less time consuming and less expensive than traditional ones.

President Bush's signing of The No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 made a federal policy agenda of what had been state efforts to reshape the face of American public education using

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standards and accountability tools. This law acknowledged, some would say blessed, the desires of many conservative policymakers to deregulate, privatize, and commercialize teacher training. These policymakers believed that the solution to failing schools was competition and choice. The same ideas that drove charter-school and voucher initiatives were being applied to teachers and teacher education. If colleges and schools of education were not willing or able to produce the quantity and kinds of teachers schools needed, then others ought to be allowed to do so.

Within a few years, the landscape for teacher education has changed radically. An agenda for teacher professionalism that had been developing steadily in the 1990s has been sidelined politically. Commonly, teacher educators had modeled professional work in teaching along the lines successfully employed by medicine and law in the early twentieth century. They strove to ally the profession with scientific knowledge being produced by the universities, create professional bodies to set professional standards for licensure and professional education, and seek societal and policy jurisdiction for controlling professional practice.

This internal control strategy lost its potency in recent years as free market conservatives have created alternative goals, alternative routes, and alternative policies in education and teacher training. The public legitimacy and social jurisdiction sought by professional educators has not been attained; rather, in many ways it has been undone by the "end run" of alternative conceptions. Even the very ideal of teacher work has been reconstructed by some influential policymakers, who argue teaching is not a learned profession relying on expert judgment but a skilled occupation driven by technique and management.

When the Holmes Group reconstituted itself as the Holmes Partnership in 1996, it was more than merely a change in name. It signified a change in philosophy. The organization's members acknowledged that change across the system

cannot be levied by the institutions of higher education alone, but must involve a partnership among all of the stakeholders including K-12 teachers, K-12 administrators, and teacher organization leaders. Beginning in 2002, the cadre of stakeholders broadened further to include policymakers at the local, state, and national levels.

In the short time since, it has become evident to Holmes that partnering with policymakers was not an effective solution. The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act undermined many of the efforts of the Holmes Partnership and other similar reform networks by opening the door for initiatives that threaten both quality teacher education and the profession of teaching. As a result, the Holmes Partnership board of directors, led by the current President Robert Yinger, embarked on an innovative campaign to transform the organization, once again broadening the concept of partnership by engaging the public. This, by engaging the public through a deliberative process, will create a different role for the organization and new kinds of relationships among its members. The issue at hand is one of building trust. By engaging the public and building a relationship around the issue of education, the public will be more likely to delegate the responsibility of formal education to those who have the expertise in the field. Leading this initiative, the Holmes Partnership will set an example of a new way of partnering for education reform and renewal. The organization leaders will introduce the concept of creating a public by going outside the education establishment and, in doing so, creating a new social contract.

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The Holmes
Partnership

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