

To Our Readers:

I am pleased to introduce this special issue of the Economic Policy Review, which is devoted to the proceedings of the conference “Excellence in Education: Views on Improving American Education.” The conference, held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York on November 14, 1997, brought together leading economists and educators to explore the best policies for improving the performance of our schools.

All of you know how critical the education of our children is to the future of this country. We must give our young people the knowledge and skills they need to build productive careers and to contribute to a strong economy. As a nation, we want to be positioned to succeed in the global economy, with low levels of unemployment and high levels of expertise, creativity, and initiative.

In the field of applied microeconomics, economists seek to explain what factors make workers more productive. Similarly, educators seek to identify ways of enabling students to learn more effectively. The Fed conference provided a forum in which these two disciplines could share the latest research findings and discuss the strategies that are most likely to strengthen student performance. The conference also benefited from the participation of other key players in the effort to improve education, including representatives of parent organizations and nonprofit groups that fund school reform initiatives.

My hope is that this issue of the Economic Policy Review will spur your thinking about these matters. The volume opens with a brief overview of the themes and recommendations put forward in the papers presented at the conference. The overview is followed by remarks given before the conference by Rudy Crew, chancellor of the New York City public schools, on the creation of a standards-based school system. The papers themselves cover a broad range of topics, including the effectiveness of current school spending, the impact of school choice on student achievement, and the importance of educational standards.

As with most complex issues, there are no simple answers to the question of how we help our schools produce the best educated workers. But the field of economics can help to clarify which policies will have the greatest impact. I am confident that by reading this volume, you will gain a fuller understanding of how we should spend our educational resources to close the gap between the skills we provide our children now and the skills they will need in the increasingly competitive economy of the future.



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