

# Education Governors for the 21st Century

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Ferrel Guillory

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# Education Governors for the 21st Century

## Education Governors: Heroes or Master Builders?

*What does it mean to be an “education governor” in the 21st century?*

The governors from both parties profiled in this valuable new guide each offer vivid examples of individual courage and a deeply-held belief that the future of children and the well-being of states are inextricably bound. Such individual traits and convictions are no doubt important. But these profiles of governors carry a more significant message and challenge. If the goal is for “education governors” to become the rule rather than the exception in all 50 states, then we need to shift our thinking once and for all away from the “superhero” model to something closer to the “master builder” idea.



As this report suggests, the crucial elements of successful gubernatorial leadership in education have less to do with individual heroism than with a willingness and ability to set priorities based on data, a thorough knowledge of research and what works, and an understanding of how to build consensus “brick by brick” and pick the right battles when necessary.

At all levels of education, whether principals, superintendents, state chiefs or governors, superheroes come and go and tend to be in very short supply. The precepts of successful gubernatorial leadership you’ll read about in the following pages suggest a far more durable, attainable and replicable model than the search for scarce superheroes. In the end, the real tests of who earns the title “education governor” are whether the leadership is fact-based, broad and inclusive, and whether the results are built to last beyond the tenure of the officeholder and reach the kids who most need them.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "M. Christine DeVita".

**M. Christine DeVita**  
President  
The Wallace Foundation



I founded the Hunt Institute to work with leaders to ensure the future of America through quality education. We have been fortunate to have such an able partner in the Wallace Foundation with this same goal. Together, we decided to craft a document for leaders to use in helping them understand what it takes for a governor to effect and sustain improvement in education. We looked at data, surveyed former governors, spoke with education experts and met with practitioners. From these discussions we were struck by the importance of gubernatorial leadership as a lever to make the systemic changes that result in improved student achievement.

In this paper we look at examples from the past to make suggestions for the future. As you will read, over the years “education governors” have come from both parties and have taken different approaches to improving education in their states. There are, however, important qualities that they have shared: passion for learning and becoming informed on education issues; skill in presenting a coherent and cohesive agenda; motivation in expending political capital to effect change; and a knack for building consensus.

I know from my own experience that honing these traits for education has carryover to other policy areas. In the end, being an effective leader for education will not only improve the lives of our young people, but it can also be a catalyst for an overall successful policy agenda.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "J. B. Hunt".

**James B. Hunt, Jr.**  
Chairman  
James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy

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# Education Governors for the 21st Century

## Introduction: Governors as the pivot

Governors who put education at the center of their agendas and aspirations act in a grand tradition of American political leadership. Among those who did so are leaders who made an indelible mark on U.S. history both during their gubernatorial terms and afterwards.

Consider, for example, Robert M. LaFollette, a Wisconsin Republican, and Charles B. Aycock, a North Carolina Democrat, both of whose terms as governors began in 1901.

LaFollette, a leader of the progressive movement of the early 20th century, increased spending on public education in pursuing his government reform agenda that came to be known as the “Wisconsin Idea.” He called on his state’s public university professors to help shape reform laws and, in his first address to the legislature in 1901, LaFollette declared, “The state will not have discharged its duty to the university nor the university fulfilled its mission to the people until adequate means have been furnished to every young man and woman in the state to acquire an education at home in every department of learning.”

Aycock, elected as Democrats recaptured control in his state from Reconstruction Republicans, established himself as the father of the state’s modern public education system. In 1901, under Aycock’s leadership, the N.C. General Assembly approved the first direct appropriation of tax funds for public schools, and nearly 1,100 schools were built across the state during his four years in office.

A quarter of a century later, Huey Long, a full-throated populist Democrat, rose to power in Louisiana. And while Long is remembered for his ardent accumulation of power, the providing of free text books to school children, blacks as well as whites, is often cited as a centerpiece of his record as governor. Nelson Rockefeller, the Republican governor of New York from 1959 to 1973, used his gubernatorial power to create the extensive higher education system known as the State University of New York.

The quintessential education governor, Terry Sanford, served as chief executive of North Carolina from 1961 to

1965. Sanford, a Democrat, stood apart from most of his Southern peers in declining to join in resistance to court-ordered school desegregation. Instead, Sanford convinced the legislature to raise taxes to enhance public education, and he got community colleges rooted into the educational landscape. After leaving office, Sanford led the effort to establish the Education Commission of the States.

Despite these examples of governors as change-agents, scholars who study politics and governance in the American states point out that governors generally did not, until relatively recently, assume a central role in education policy making. For much of the 20th century, public school funding came largely from local revenue sources. While states had constitutional authority over public education, Frederick Wirt and Samuel Gove have observed, “Prior to the 1970s, the governors’ role in school policy was almost nonexistent.”

A distinct local-to-state shift in governance and funding took place over the last half of the 20th century, resulting from a variety of forces: civil rights court rulings, the nation’s reaction to the Soviet Sputnik launch, the demand of businesses for higher standards that would produce a stronger workforce.

After the United States went through a period of wrenching political and social upheaval in the 1960s, economic change accelerated, driven by powerful forces of globalization, technology and a knowledge revolution. It became increasingly evident that education formed the basis for economic advancement. And increasingly, governors rose to the challenge

Now, states devote nearly half of their general fund expenditures to education. According to the National Association of State Budget Officers, elementary and secondary education accounted for 35.5 percent of general fund spending, with higher education getting 12.1 percent, in fiscal year 2003.

“Clearly,” Wirt and Gove write, “the governorship has now become the pivot of education policy-making in the American states.”

***Almost every state that has made dramatic progress in improving schools and student learning traces its progress to strong and visionary leadership by deeply involved and committed governors.***

James B. Hunt, Jr.,  
Governor of North  
Carolina,  
1977-85, 1993-2001

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## How to, not what to

This paper attempts to describe how governors – and gubernatorial aspirants – can exercise leadership on behalf of the children, teenagers, young adults and mature adults who fill classrooms from pre-school through graduate school. It explores how governors can use their formal and informal powers effectively to advance an education agenda.

This paper has two fundamental goals:

- To explore the environment in which governors define their approach to education.
- To understand the leadership traits and skills of governors who sustained improvements in public education.

Several sources inform the analysis that follows: academic studies of governors and gubernatorial powers; speeches by an array of former governors; and extensive interviews with three former governors: Jim Hunt of North Carolina, Roy Barnes of Georgia and Jim Geringer of Wyoming.

It is not the purpose here to promote anyone's agenda or point of view on specific issues. Governors will develop their education agendas in light of their own sense of values and the context and condition of their own states. This analysis is offered in the hope that it can provide political leaders, particularly governors, with insights and advice that will inspire and guide them toward a more effective use of their power.

Still, embedded in this analysis is a distinct point of view: that America's public education institutions require constant nurturing to assure high-quality teaching and learning, and that strong "education governors" are essential to America's future. The conviction here is that education reform combines good politics and good government.

It is crucial that governors, as well as candidates for governor, deepen their own knowledge of why education matters – increasingly so – so that they can motivate themselves as well as their constituents. Governors enter office in widely varying state cultures, institutional settings, partisan alignments and economic conditions. But whatever their states, governors can focus on three big-picture rationales for exercising leadership in education:

- A fast-changing economy requires it.
- The health of American democracy depends on it.
- And it gives more people an opportunity to join the winner's circle of success and happiness in life.

## Why it's imperative

**Economy/Demography:** America finds itself caught in a tightening vise – consisting on one side of economic change and on the other of population shifts.

The new economy has given birth to new jobs while simultaneously destroying old jobs, thus dramatically altering the patterns of work. Farms and factories no longer offer reasonably steady work at livable pay as they did a century ago; and now, Americans are more likely to find work operating a computer or a cash register, delivering legal, health and social services, or attending elderly patients or managing a team of office workers.

Over the past two decades, the earnings premium for additional education has increased. The more you know, the even more you can earn. But for men with no more than a high school diploma, the last quarter of a century has brought a decline in real earnings.

Simultaneously, converging demographic trends continue to remake the face of the nation. The baby-boom generation nears retirement, with hundreds of thousands of professionals and middle-managers, not to mention school administrators and teachers, who will soon complete their working lives, presenting challenges to both public and private sectors to fill job vacancies with competent younger employees.

The baby-boom generation is heavily white, while Generations X and Y, as they are popularly known, are more multi-ethnic. Although whites remain in the majority, the nation will have to depend for its own well-being on a population with a larger share of blacks and Latinos.

From the perspective of governors, education has become a key determining factor of the future success of their constituents and their communities. For individuals, education is an increasingly valuable asset. For communities, the quality of their schools and colleges contributes to their attractiveness and economic competitiveness.

**Democracy:** Thomas Jefferson, a former governor of Virginia, understood that the new nation he helped create needed citizens with competence in the duties of self-government. Just as the economy needs flexible thinkers and creative problem solvers as workers and managers, so America's public life needs flexible thinkers and problem solvers capable of analyzing and exercising judgment on public issues.

The 2004 elections demonstrated once again that

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Americans with college degrees participate at a significantly greater rate than Americans without degrees. Of adults 25 years old and older, one in four has a bachelor's degree and above. But in the electorate of 2004, according to the national exit poll, two out of five voters nationally have a bachelor's or advanced degree.

**Quality of life:** Americans are not only workers and voters, but also parents, consumers, neighbors, spectators and worshippers. If education is an increasingly vital prerequisite of economic advancement and political participation, education also invests people with greater discernment, giving them enhanced ability to take better care of their health, to become knowledgeable purchasers of consumer products and to make informed choices in parenting. Education also imbues people with a deeper appreciation of listening to, looking at and delving into works of art on paper, screen and even CD.

In an age of enormous mobility, of information overload, of global flows of data and people that override longstanding boundaries, it is essential that Americans develop a deeper understanding of history, the ability to put disparate data in context, a frame of mind that goes beyond stereotypes and contains a vision of the future.

The nation serves itself through its schools by forming whole persons, who act ethically, who think critically and who build communities.

**New Challenges:** In addition to such big-picture reasons for gubernatorial action, education-related trends serve as warning bells and form the basis for a governor's leadership:

■ After a period in which the nation has focused on standards and accountability, high school dropout rates have risen again. Jay Matthews, the education correspondent of *The Washington Post*, was no doubt correct in writing that "whatever their problems, American public schools are educating a bigger slice of society at a higher level than has ever been achieved in human history." Still, the U.S. faces what some scholars have called a "dropout crisis." Statisticians use several methods to measure dropouts. While rates vary markedly from state to state, the data show, across the nation, that 20 percent to 30 percent of teenagers do not complete high school and graduate in four years.

■ While young Black Americans have narrowed the gap in high school completion with whites, a wide gap remains in college-degree attainment. One in three white 25- to 29-year-old has at least a bachelor's degree, according to Census data, but only 15% of blacks and 9% of Latinos.

■ America has an aging teacher force, with school systems now facing intensifying shortages. Over the next decade or so – as a consequence of the aging baby-boom generation, the nation will have to replace three in four of its current teachers. Even more teachers will be required in order to reduce class size. A similar brain-drain of experienced professors is anticipated from universities.

■ School leadership is crucial to high performing schools. Current preparation programs are geared to providing educators with credentials, but not to producing enough well qualified leaders to meet demand. In addition, conditions faced by school leaders in hard-to-staff schools and districts prevent many potential principals and superintendents from entering, and drive out many practicing professionals.

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## Treading through a governance minefield

Since *A Nation at Risk* galvanized opinion leaders in 1983, multiple waves of reforms have rolled across the land, attempting to improve the academic achievement of students. In particular, that report united governors, business and other key state and national leaders around the development of standards, assessment and accountability systems that measure the performance of students and schools. More recently, governors have faced pressures emanating from the American system of checks-and-balances and federalism.

In many states, court rulings have influenced education policy. In one sense, this is not new. After all, *Brown v. Board of Education* and follow-up rulings cracked the segregated schools of the South. Now, cases largely brought by rural and inner-city interests over disparities in resources have led to judges issuing rulings requiring equity in funding and defining adequacy in educational offerings.

Meanwhile, the federal government has taken a substantial step toward nationalizing educational policy through the *No Child Left Behind* Act. That law imposes penalties on schools – and by extension states – for failing to make annual gains among specified groups of students. Debate continues over whether the executive and legislative branches of the federal government have provided sufficient funding to carry out the law.

At a time when the nation needs more high school graduates, and more of them to go on to college, tuition and related costs of higher education have risen well beyond the rate of inflation. Federal programs designed to make college affordable have not kept pace.

Federalism and litigation only heat up an already complex cauldron from which education policy-making emerges. In some states where a governor does not appoint the chief state school officer, the governor must deal with an independently elected public official. In most states, K-12 schools, community colleges and universities have distinct – and distinctly powerful – governing boards. In some states, teachers have organized themselves in classical labor unions, while in other states teachers work through professional-and-lobbying associations. States differ markedly in the number, size and scope of local school districts, and in how funding is shared among state and federal revenue sources. Add to the cauldron a dizzying array of think-tanks, demonstration-project organizers,

foundations, schools of education, ideological advocacy groups, and multiple levels of state and local officialdom.

Clearly, a governor can't govern in isolation, especially so in education. And yet, in this environment, who else but a governor can bring focus to a state's effort to respond to federal mandates, court rulings and the opinions and aspirations of teachers, parents, business leaders and students?

## What it takes

As daunting as the task may seem, more and more governors have sought to earn a reputation as an “education governor” – and candidates for governor invariably campaign on platforms that highlight education issues. So now the question is: What does it take to serve as an “education governor” in the 21st century?

Answers flow out of the experiences of governors themselves. Governors can learn by examining what other governors have done, what has worked and what has not.

In the 21st century, successful education governors use modern tools of governance to build support for their initiatives. The tools come in a mixture of formal and informal powers:

**Formal, or institutional, powers:** Use of the veto; initiating a budget proposal and managing a balanced budget; appointments to executive agencies, boards and commissioners; influence with a party majority in the legislature; ability to run for another term.

**Informal, or intangible, powers:** Access to the news media; popular support; political networks; ability to convene; negotiating skills; prestige of the position; zeal and energy that occupant brings to the office.

What follows is an outline, drawn from the words and records of former governors, of the basic elements of an “education governorship.”

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## 1 | **A 21st century education governor becomes thoroughly informed by current research and best practices.**

The education of an education governor begins well before the oath of office is pronounced. It begins before the campaign for office – and indeed it includes the campaign itself. A creatively designed campaign will take a candidate to forums and venues where s/he can learn how schools, colleges and universities are performing. What's more, the drafting of position papers can be used as an exercise in introducing a prospective governor to relevant research and data.

“The political campaign ought to be part of the diversity in learning experiences for would-be political leaders,” said Bob Graham, a former governor and former U.S. senator from Florida. “If I were a journalist interviewing political candidates, the first question that I would ask all of them is: Where did you start your political campaign? The second question would be: Since that date, what have you experienced, what have you learned, and what changes have occurred that have made you a better person to serve in the office that you are seeking than prior to that date? The present trend to dilute political campaigns by limiting the activities of candidates in order to showcase them also deprives them of an enriching educational experience.”

Once in office, the education of a governor continues. You can figure out what an elected official is truly interested in by examining how he or she arrays his staff. Jim Hunt, the former four-term governor of North Carolina, surrounded himself with experts in education – “the voice of education” – by appointing a cabinet-level senior education adviser and the first teacher adviser in the country on his gubernatorial staff.

Booth Gardner, the former governor of Washington and former chair of the National Governors Association, said he drew on three major national reports on education reform to guide his policies, including a report drafted under the leadership of Lamar Alexander when he was governor of Tennessee. Gardner is a Democrat, Alexander a Republican. Also, Gardner pointed to two books influential in driving school reform in the 1980s:

“I was influenced and guided by the work and counsel of John Goodlad of the University of Washington and

Ted Sizer of Brown University. Goodlad's *A Place Called School* and Sizer's *Horace's Compromise* are compelling works calling for change and innovation in our schools.”

— Booth Gardner, Governor of Washington, 1985-1993

## 2 | **A 21st century education governor formulates a cohesive policy agenda, uses data, examines the landscape for emerging issues and clearly sets out priorities.**

When Jim Geringer and Roy Barnes defined how they set priorities in education, they practically echoed each other. “Every time someone proposed a new initiative, I asked, what is this doing to improve student learning?” said Geringer, the former governor of Wyoming.

When he met with education leaders, Barnes, the former governor of Georgia, said he met them with a constant refrain – “Does this help the child, or does it help the adults in the system?”

Whatever question or construct a governor uses to help frame education issues, it's imperative that a governor have a sense of priorities. That means concentrating on key issues to the exclusion of others, however painful or unpopular that might be with certain constituencies. To try to do everything at once is to avoid setting priorities.

Data, well analyzed, can help a governor determine the state's most urgent needs. Data-driven reform works from the state house all the way to the school house. Data form a powerful tool for breaking down barriers and charting a pathway toward success. Where is a state weak? Where is it strong? How many young people are dropping out of high school and college, and why? What gaps do test scores point to?

At first glance it may seem insignificant, even silly, but Lamar Alexander also points to the power of giving priorities a name.

Effective governors “need to know how to name things. For example: ‘Basic Skills First. Computer Skills Next.’ ‘Master Teachers. Master Principals.’ ‘Governor's Schools. Better Schools.’...Walk out into the street and ask anybody if they would favor a ‘Comprehensive Education Reform Package,’ and they'll be asleep before you can get through the second two words...Name it right and half the battle is won.”

— Lamar Alexander, Governor of Tennessee, 1979-1987

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## 3 | **A 21st century education governor uses the bully pulpit and political levers to solidify public support, build coalitions and position himself or herself as the driving leader.**

Today, in the United States, the political climate makes it difficult for governors to exert effective leadership and achieve consensus. In many states, there is no “natural” political majority. Neither Democrats nor Republicans have an assured majority. The exit poll of voters in the 2004 election makes this crystal clear: 37 percent of voters described themselves as Democrats, 37 percent self-described as Republicans and 26 percent said they were independent.

What’s more, growing evidence suggests that American voters have increasingly sorted themselves along partisan lines, and that redistricting has made more constituencies “safer” for one party or another. Republican districts have become more Republican; Democratic districts more Democratic – and thus more legislators come from politically identifiable districts and fewer from “swing” districts of diverse viewpoints.

Thus, the political climate requires governors to do two things: forge strong political alliances with powerful individuals and organizations and develop a persuasive political message that solidifies public support. In effect, governors must “campaign” for educational reform, using the tools that they used in their own run for office: surveys, focus groups, speeches, meetings with constituencies.

“Just through the sheer force of leadership,” said Richard Riley, a former governor of South Carolina and former U.S. secretary of education, “governors can focus the attention of the people on an issue, explain what it is, and then move the state toward an equitable solution. To do this effectively, they must take time to understand their roles and how they personally fit into the situation before deciding on a course of action. By setting the tone and coordinating their effort, they can crystallize the attention of the public on a problem and obtain their acceptance of a solution...By using the governor’s office as a catalyst for change, we were able to spark a grass-roots reform effort that resulted not only in passage of nationally recognized education legislation, but also in a penny sale-tax increase that many political experts predicted we would never win.”

Former Gov. William Winter of Mississippi tells a similar story. It took him nearly the entire four years of his term to build up the momentum for a landmark school improvement package in his state – with the final push in the legislature coming after he had organized campaign-like rallies across the state to convince lawmakers of the public’s support.

Sometimes, there is no substitute for old-fashioned give-and-take, trading and compromise. “You have to convince legislators that compromise must exist in politics. They (legislators) have to vote for things because it’s the right thing to do. You have to engage in traditional politics to accomplish good results. Politics is about consensus building – making sure that you don’t give away the farm, but that you can help with the issues that the particular legislator is interested in to ensure that your legislation gets passed.”

— Roy Barnes, Governor of Georgia, 1999-2003

Sometimes, political leadership requires a fight – a fight that galvanizes allies, clarifies choices and defines the seriousness of a governor’s leadership to voters. Former Gov. John Engler of Michigan pushed a state takeover of the Detroit schools, shifting decision-making power from the elected school board to an appointed board. Former Gov. Paul Patton of Kentucky challenged a powerful university governing structure in constructing a community and technical college system.

And several governors have engaged in fights over substantive issues with teachers, including Bill Clinton when he was governor of Arkansas. Clinton proposed teacher testing that was opposed by the Arkansas Education Association. A case study of the Clinton gubernatorial experience by political scientist Dan Durning found that “the teacher-testing issue proved for Clinton to be both troublesome and a political bonanza. It was troublesome because of the ferocity of the AEA’s opposition ...(But) by standing up to the AEA on this issue, Clinton was seen as a strong, gutsy governor.”

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## 4 | **A 21st century education governor engages stakeholders in the design and implementation of the agenda, and manages how and when to proceed with new policy initiatives.**

A brief case study of former North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt, a Democrat, is instructive – in large part because he was elected four times, serving two eight-year terms, divided by eight years out of office. Thus Hunt showed the importance of gubernatorial leadership in managing the gathering of support for and the timing of education initiatives.

Hunt embraced public education as a life-long passion. And, he said, he learned from former Gov. Terry Sanford that “a governor has to be audacious.” As lieutenant governor in the early 1970s, Hunt, a Democrat, worked in harmony with Gov. James Holshouser, a Republican, in getting the legislature to approve statewide kindergarten in the public schools.

Hunt’s first two terms as governor ran from 1977 to 1985. In his initial state of the state address, Hunt proposed an investment of \$15 million to put reading aides in the first three grades. To demonstrate his own commitment, the governor devoted an hour a week to serving as a reading aide in a public school in Raleigh. Subsequently, he got the legislature to enact a “competency test” for high school students – one of the nation’s earliest efforts at using tests to prod schools to improve and to hold them accountable to citizens. When students fared poorly on a trial run, Hunt approved the testing commission’s recommendation for easing the standards.

In addition, Hunt established a residential high school for high-performers in science and math – a school in Durham that is still turning out graduates who go onto elite universities. Also, in a display of gubernatorial muscle, Hunt got the Council of State, consisting of statewide elected officials, to approve the transfer of a large swath of land from the Department of Agriculture to N.C. State University that led to the development of what is now known as Centennial Campus, featuring research with university, corporate and government facilities intertwined. The Hunt administration also attempted to put together an initiative to strengthen families and bolster services for pre-school children, but it did not gain traction and was assailed by social conservatives.

By the end of his first two-term stint as governor, Hunt had firmly established his credentials as an “education governor” who saw the link between education and economic development. But, in retrospect, his initiatives, while bold for their time, did not add up to a thematic or altogether thorough approach to school improvement. When asked what he learned from his first two terms that carried over into his second two terms, Gov. Hunt said that he learned that he needed to do a lot more “meeting and greeting” to work with key leaders and constituents to build an agenda that represented the “will of the people.”

“The governor has to pull the superintendent of public instruction, the chair of the State Board of Education, business, community representatives and legislators – everyone with a stake in education policy – to build a single voice for education.”

— James B. Hunt, Jr., Governor of North Carolina  
1997-1985, 1993-2001

Hunt’s second two-term governorship ran from 1993 to 2001, and he proceeded with what he described as a “real mind-shift.” He saw the pattern of randomness of education programs – unaligned, undirected – and the need, in its place, for aligning education governance and programs into a more cohesive pattern to carry out a longer-term strategy. To emphasize that he would govern according to a defined set of priorities, Hunt placed a poster on a tripod in his office, listing his top 10 priorities, where both visitors and he himself would see it.

Governing during a time of economic and budgetary growth, Hunt gained the support of the state’s teacher organizations by a series of teacher pay raises designed to move North Carolina to the national average. Reaching out to another key constituency, Gov. Hunt established the North Carolina Council for Economic Development, consisting of the chief executive officers of 22 major corporations in the state.

“Coming in to my second two terms,” he said, “I understood how critical business is to education reform. They have to carry the message and convince the public. And, they’re the ones to do it; they have the credibility.”

As he prepared to launch an early-childhood initiative, Hunt appointed a commission to develop a plan, and as chair he appointed a TV-station executive who is a

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Republican. Unlike the “Raising a New Generation” initiative that hardly got off the ground in his first term, the commission proposed – and Hunt adopted – a decentralized approach. State government would fund coalitions of local agencies that would develop their own services for pre-school youngsters. Republican legislators mostly opposed it, but Hunt got business executives to testify in support (as well as to provide additional philanthropic money). The governor moved year by year to expand the program now known as Smart Start that has become a model for other states.

Hunt came to view the intransigence of the education community, as well as its diffused governing structure, as impediments to education reform. He held a monthly breakfast with his senior education advisor, the state superintendent and the State Board of Education chair and bi-monthly lunches with members of the State Board of Education. In addition, he chaired an “Education Cabinet,” bringing together the chief administrators and board chairs of the K-12 public schools, community colleges and universities.

“Educators can’t do it (change education) on their own,” he said. “Sometimes educators are not on the right track, and the governor has to lead them to the right track. ...High standards and rigorous assessments almost always have to come from outside the education community. That’s what a governor has to promote.”

In addition to Smart Start and teacher-pay raises, Hunt’s second two-term tenure included enactment of the Excellent Schools Act and the ABCs program – representing a more thorough-going approach to education advancement. North Carolina adopted its own regimen of testing. Now, reports on school improvement go out to the public, teachers receive bonuses when their schools exceed objectives and the state provides financial incentives to teachers who win certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which Hunt had a leading role in establishing.

Beginning in the late 1990s and continuing into 2003, North Carolina has regularly been cited for its student achievement gains on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) tests. In 1998 the National Education Goals Panel commissioned RAND Corporation researchers to conduct case studies of North Carolina and Texas to examine reasons for the persistent gains in student performance.

Their report noted that spending targeted on schools with at-risk young people made a difference. Significantly, the report also proposed that the most “plausible” explanation for the test score gains was found in the policy environment of the state: political leadership, business leadership and continuity of reforms over time mattered.

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## What's a governor to do

At the beginning of the year 2005, the U.S. has 28 Republican governors, and 22 who are Democrats. While New York Gov. George Pataki is the most senior U.S. governor, serving since January 1995, fully 38 governors are in their first terms. Of the 50 governors, nine formerly served in Congress, 24 in state legislatures, ten as mayors and 11 did not hold elective office before becoming governor.

In the interviews with former Govs. Hunt, Barnes and Geringer, each was asked what advice he would give to governors, especially new governors. The points that follow draw on those interviews, supplemented by a review of gubernatorial speeches and recent studies.

### **An education governor...**

- Leads the effort to improve schools. It is up to a governor to drive the state's education agenda.
  - Does his or her homework. A governor must learn about education and know what it takes for young people to learn and adults to upgrade their learning and skills.
  - Surrounds him- or herself with smart people who know about education. A governor must appoint commissions of knowledgeable and influential people to assist in defining the agenda, and establishing a state-level vehicle for change.
  - Identifies and prioritizes the educational needs of the state. A governor must devise a program to meet those needs, along with appropriations needed to carry it out.
  - Uses data. It's up to the governor to insist that policy makers and school leaders heed the messages that data send about the condition of their schools and their educational systems.
  - Develops strategic partnerships. A governor must get business people invested, working with education administrators and teachers, and, above all, getting a clear mandate from the people.
  - Learns from the practical experiences of other governors. A governor must look to the experience and success of current and past education governors throughout the nation.
  - Uses the bully pulpit. Education governors must build a public mandate so they can inform and move both public policy and the legislature.
  - Stays at it. Persistence in driving good policy through to law is essential to long term success.
  - Institutionalizes reform efforts that have worked, or that have a chance to work. Out-going governors must talk honestly with incoming governors about the importance of successive policies to carry reform efforts through.
  - Teaches others. Experienced incumbents and former governors need to help new governors to become committed leaders for education by passing on what they have learned.
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## Journey toward the next break-through

In 1966, a little more than a year after he completed his term as governor of North Carolina, Terry Sanford published a book, *But What About the People?*, which he wrote while simultaneously leading the effort that established the Education Commission of the States. In it he wrote, “The more you do to improve education, the more you discover what is yet to be done. Each breakthrough opens a window on another unexplored frontier.”

Sanford’s words remind current and future governors that education will remain a work in progress: that there are no silver-bullet final solutions, that leadership demands both vision and perseverance.

Sanford’s observation that “each breakthrough” in education “opens a window” onto another challenging frontier rings as true – perhaps even more so – now as it did 35 years ago. Schools remain crucial to America’s economy, its quality-of-life, its democracy. And, for a governor, it’s a challenging and energizing adventure to work toward the next breakthrough in education.

## Appendix

### Selected Examples of Gubernatorial Education Initiatives

LAMAR ALEXANDER, REPUBLICAN, TENNESSEE, 1979-1987

Lamar Alexander is a graduate of Vanderbilt University and New York University School of Law. He served as legislative assistant to Sen. Howard Baker and executive assistant to the White House counselor in charge of congressional relations. He won his second bid for governor in 1978. With his re-election in 1982, Alexander became Tennessee's first governor to be elected to successive four-year terms. In 1991, then-President George H.W. Bush named Alexander U.S. secretary of education. His most notable achievements in Tennessee were:

Better Schools Program: In 1984, at the urging of Gov. Alexander, the Tennessee Legislature raised their 4.5 percent sales tax by one penny to pay for education reforms. The hike produced more than \$1 billion in its first three years, all of it earmarked for education. The law funded programs for vocational, gifted and disruptive students; authorized a lower-grades curriculum stressing basic skills and computer knowledge; and required additional math and science courses and an exit exam for high school graduation. It also mandated district "report cards," a relatively early attempt to make schools more accountable to parents and the public. Much of the bill focused on teachers, reflecting the idea that the most direct route to better learning is better teachers. The legislation called for changes in educator pay and certification, teacher-preparation programs and professional development.

Master Teachers and Principals Career Ladder: Despite fierce opposition from Tennessee's largest teacher union, Gov. Alexander used the proceeds of his tax hike to implement the Master Teachers and Principals Career Ladder program. The program provided financial incentives of between \$1,000 and \$7,000 per year for teachers proceeding through five levels of certification. Progression to the next certification level was tied not just to time spent in the classroom, but to classroom evaluations and documented skills.

NAEP Performance: Gov. Alexander served as chairman of the task force charged with revising *The Nation's Report Card*. The task force was instrumental in implementing the first state-level National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments. Since the first state-level assessment results were released, Tennessee's fourth graders have improved their performance on the NAEP math assessment by 14 percentage points and the state's eighth graders have improved their performance by 9 percentage points.



JOHN ENGLER, REPUBLICAN, MICHIGAN, 1991-2003

John Engler earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural economics from Michigan State University in 1970 and a law degree from the Thomas M. Cooley Law School in 1985. Prior to his first term as governor, he served for 20 years in the state legislature, including seven years as Senate majority leader. Gov. Engler served as Michigan's governor for 12 years. His most notable achievements in education were:

Proposal A: In the early 1990s, Michigan's property tax burden was 35 percent above the national average due in part to frequent and irregular local tax changes. In 1993, Michigan voters approved Proposal A, a constitutional amendment to cut property taxes for education. Proposal A shifted the majority of school funding from local property taxes to the state sales tax, which increased from four to six cents per dollar. The plan cut property taxes by a third, alleviated equity gaps in per-pupil funding between districts, established a portable foundation grant for each student and created a per-pupil funding guarantee for public schools. Since the adoption of Proposal A, state and local funding for public schools has increased by nearly 80 percent, from \$7.9 billion in 1990 to \$14.1 billion in 2002.

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School Choice: In 1993, Gov. Engler approved legislation authorizing the creation of public school academies or charter schools. At the time, Michigan had adopted some of the most progressive school choice provisions in the country. Michigan's charter school program now boasts over 180 schools, serving 66,000 students. In 1996, Gov. Engler's administration implemented a public schools-of-choice program that allows students to transfer to schools outside of their local district. School districts found the proposal attractive because state per pupil allocations traveled with each student. In 2002, nearly 35,000 students participated in the schools-of-choice program.

Detroit Takeover: Citing dismal student performance, Gov. Engler pushed a state takeover of the Detroit schools, shifting decision-making power from the elected school board to an appointed board. Since then, Detroit schools have seen the implementation of a district-wide improvement plan that includes a new technology initiative, efforts to direct more money to the classroom through privatization of non-instructional services and an active public relations campaign to promote the district and draw new students to Detroit schools. While Gov. Engler continues to tout the state takeover plan, it has yet to improve student performance in Detroit. Detroit test scores have remained stagnant, even declining in some subjects, since 1999.

Michigan Merit Award: In 1999, Gov. Engler established the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship, which provided a \$2,500 grant to high school graduates who passed their state proficiency tests in reading, writing, science and math. The award could be used at any approved postsecondary educational institution. In 2002, 54 percent, or nearly 52,000, Michigan high school seniors qualified for the award. Critics of the program note that minority students and students in poorer high schools are least likely to qualify for the scholarships and that the grants are being awarded to students who are most likely to attend college even without financial assistance.

Broad Center for Urban Superintendents: In conjunction with the Eli Broad Foundation, Gov. Engler established the Broad Center for Urban Superintendents. The Center seeks to recruit and train qualified leaders for urban school districts. Participants must have at least 15 years of experience in large, complex organizations in corporate, military, higher education or government settings.

Governor's Teacher Technology Initiative: The Governor's Teacher Technology Initiative provided Michigan's 90,000 public school teachers with \$110 million for computers, computer training and Internet access.

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JAMES B. HUNT, JR., DEMOCRAT, NORTH CAROLINA, 1977-1985 AND 1993-2001

James B. Hunt, Jr., received a bachelor's degree in agricultural education in 1959 and a master's in agricultural economics in 1962 from North Carolina State University. He earned a law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law in 1964. He served as lieutenant governor from 1973 to 1977 and as governor from 1977 to 1985 and again from 1993 to 2001. Hunt focused on improving public education during his sixteen-year tenure. His most notable achievements in education were:

Smart Start: In 1993, Gov. Hunt created the Smart Start early childhood initiative to ensure that all children enter school healthy and prepared to succeed. The program operates through community partnerships that involve state government, local leaders, service providers and families in examining their community's needs and designing interventions to meet those needs. Smart Start has improved child care teacher education levels, lowered child-to-teacher ratios in child care programs, increased child care teacher salary levels, promoted greater family involvement and provided increased access to health screenings and immunizations.

Excellent Schools Act in 1997: Gov. Hunt unveiled his Excellent Schools Act in 1997, a four-year plan to raise standards and pay for teachers. The Excellent Schools Act increased average teacher salaries from 43rd to 23rd in the nation, provided additional pay for teachers with advanced degrees and National Board Certification, provided incentive awards for teachers in schools performing at the highest levels on state assessments, created rigorous standards for teacher certification and provided mentors for beginning teachers.

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ABC Program: Gov. Hunt implemented standards-based reform and statewide assessments to improve the performance of teachers, schools and students. North Carolina students in grades three through eight are tested in reading and mathematics and students enrolled in 10 high school courses take subject matter tests. This ground-breaking program has become a national model for states seeking to provide strong accountability, an emphasis on the basics and high educational standards, and local control for schools and school districts.

First in America: In 1999, Gov. Hunt unveiled the First in America schools initiative, seeking to make the state's schools the best in the country by 2010. He mandated the creation of an annual *Progress Report* and *Report Card*, designed to measure the state's progress toward this "audacious goal."

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards: As founding chair of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Gov. Hunt helped to develop standards for excellence in teaching as well as assessments to guarantee that teachers met these high standards. Gov. Hunt ensured that North Carolina would support its National Board Certified teachers by paying their assessment fee, providing candidates with three days of paid professional leave and rewarding successful candidates with a 12 percent salary increase. As a result, North Carolina has more board-certified teachers than any other state in the nation.

National Education Goals Panel: As chair of the National Education Goals Panel, Gov. Hunt worked vigorously to implement the Goals 2000 Program, designed to promote high standards in public schools across the nation.



THOMAS H. KEAN, REPUBLICAN, NEW JERSEY, 1982-1990

Thomas H. Kean is a graduate of Princeton and Columbia University. He served as majority leader of the New Jersey Assembly from 1971 to 1972, speaker from 1972 to 1974 and minority leader from 1974 to 1977. He was elected governor in 1981. As governor of New Jersey, he was rated among America's five most effective governors by *Newsweek* magazine and credited with more than 30 education reforms, most notably:

Master Teacher Program: Gov. Kean created a Master Teacher Program to reward outstanding teachers. Administrators and peers awarded annual \$5,000 bonuses to honorees.

Alternative Certification Program: Gov. Kean implemented one of the first alternative certification programs to enable professionals to forego introductory education coursework in becoming teachers. Applicants were required to participate in district training programs in preparation for full licensure.



PAUL E. PATTON, DEMOCRAT, KENTUCKY, 1995-2003

Paul E. Patton graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1959 with a degree in mechanical engineering. After 20 years in the coal business, he began his public service career as deputy secretary of transportation. In 1991, he was elected lieutenant governor and named secretary of economic development, becoming the first lieutenant governor to serve as an appointed cabinet secretary. He was elected governor in 1995 and re-elected in 1999. Thanks to a constitutional amendment approved in 1992, Patton was the first Kentucky governor in more than 200 years to serve two consecutive full terms in office. Gov. Patton used much of this time to build a legacy of education reform, including:

Kentucky Education Reform Act: Among the many states that had their public school financing systems invalidated by court rulings, the changes required of the Kentucky system by the courts were among the most radical. Not only did the Kentucky Supreme Court find the financing of schools in the state to be unconstitutional, but it also ruled that the "entire system of

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common schools was unconstitutional” and required the legislature to “recreate, re-establish” the entire system of public education. In a remarkably brief interlude, Kentucky passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. Comparisons of measures before and after KERA show that it has equalized funding among school districts, with some districts gaining substantially in their funding for students. Teacher salaries and student/teacher ratios have also improved relative to national averages since the introduction of KERA.

Postsecondary Education Reform Act: Gov. Patton’s Postsecondary Education Reform Act established specific and measurable goals for postsecondary education to be achieved by the year 2020. The act established a coordinating agency for postsecondary education to create a seamless, integrated system of postsecondary education, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System to ensure access to two-year programs designed for transfer to baccalaureate programs and to provide the skills training necessary to meet the needs of business and industry, and six new funding streams to reward excellence and improve access to the public universities of Kentucky.

Research Challenge Trust Fund, “Bucks for Brains”: The Research Challenge Trust Fund was developed in 1997 to ensure strategic investments in Kentucky’s universities. The program was designed to provide the universities with support for ongoing efforts to attract and retain renowned faculty and researchers. The universities must provide a dollar-for-dollar match of Trust Fund resources through budget reallocation or external grants. As of June 2003, the Trust Fund had a permanent endowment of \$392 million.

KIDS NOW: KIDS NOW, a statewide initiative established in 2000, provides an array of services to pregnant women and families with children from birth to age eight. It focuses on developing a support structure for community planning, service coordination and programming around the goals of assuring maternal and child health, supporting families, and enhancing early care and education.

Education Pays: In July 1998, Gov. Patton launched a public awareness campaign to promote the importance of educational attainment. The Education Pays campaign is widely credited with informing young people and their parents about the benefits of staying in school and pursuing a university or vocational education.

Kentucky Education Excellence Scholarship (KEES): The Kentucky Education Excellence Scholarship (KEES) allows high school graduates earning a grade average of C+ or higher to earn a scholarship for college or technical school. A graduate can earn up to \$2,500. Additional scholarship funds may be earned by doing well on the ACT or SAT college entrance exams. In 2003, the KEES program provided nearly \$54 million in higher education grants to Kentucky’s high school graduates.



RICHARD WILSON RILEY, DEMOCRAT, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1979-1987

Richard Wilson Riley graduated cum laude from Furman University in 1954, earning a bachelor’s degree in political science. Following naval service, Riley earned a law degree from the South Carolina School of Law. In 1962, Riley was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives where he served for four years. He was then elected to the state Senate and served until 1976. In 1978 and again in 1982, he was elected governor of South Carolina. In 1992, President Clinton chose Riley to be U.S. secretary of education. His most notable achievements in South Carolina were:

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Education Improvement Act of 1984: In 1983, a coalition of South Carolina business leaders, legislators and educators, through appointment by Gov. Riley, worked on two state-level committees to identify the areas of public education where reform was needed and to determine the measure of financial support that would be necessary for such reform to be accomplished. The work of these committees was used to outline the major education reform initiatives included in the 1984 Education Improvement Act. The improvement strategies in the act address the following objectives:

- ensuring that all students meet minimum standards in the basic skills;
- enhancing the teaching profession through regular salary adjustments, incentives, tuition grants and improvement grants;
- improving the performance of management and enhancing leadership through training, evaluation and incentives;
- ensuring the quality of schools through the impaired district process, school incentive programs and the school grants program;
- emphasizing partnerships among the community, business, volunteers and the schools; and
- providing school buildings that create an environment conducive to learning.

Penny for Education: The initiatives outlined in the Education Improvement Act were financed with Gov. Riley's "Penny for Education" plan. The one-cent sales tax increase provided \$240 million to improve the state's public schools.



ROY ROMER, DEMOCRAT, COLORADO, 1987-1999

Roy Romer received a bachelor's degree in agricultural economics from Colorado State University in 1950, and a law degree from the University of Colorado in 1952. From 1958 to 1966, he served in the Colorado House of Representatives and in the Colorado State Senate. Gov. Romer returned to public service in 1975, first as Colorado's commissioner of agriculture, then as the governor's chief of staff. He was appointed state treasurer in 1977. He was first elected governor of Colorado in 1986, re-elected in 1990, and again in 1994. He was named superintendent of schools of the Los Angeles Unified School District in June 2000. His most notable achievements in Colorado were:

School Choice: In 1993, Colorado became one of the first states to embrace alternative, semi-autonomous public charter schools. By 1996, there were 24 charter schools operating in the state. Gov. Romer also implemented a limited parental choice program that allowed students to transfer to schools outside of their local district or to enroll in advanced courses at state colleges and universities.

Accountability: In 1993, Colorado mandated the development of state standards in 12 subject areas. The state's new standards were designed to improve student performance and to define clear expectations for the state's students and schools. The law required school districts to meet or exceed the model state standards and to align their curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development to these standards. After extensive review and discussion by the Governor's Standards Council and the public, the state board of education formally adopted the model standards in September 1995. The American Federation of Teachers, in its analysis of state standards, found that Colorado met its criteria for specificity and clarity. Gov. Romer skillfully involved the public in building support for the new system. As a result, he was able to rely on business leaders and other supporters to defend the standards from conservative attacks and to fight for adequate state funding to fully implement the standards.

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## Supporting State Data

	<b>Lamar Alexander Tennessee 1979-87</b>	<b>John Engler Michigan 1991-2003</b>	<b>James B. Hunt, Jr. North Carolina 1977-85, 1993-2001</b>	<b>Thomas H. Kean New Jersey 1982-90</b>	<b>Paul E. Patton Kentucky 1995-2003</b>	<b>Richard Wilson Riley South Carolina 1979-87</b>	<b>Roy Romer Colorado 1987-99</b>
NAEP Reading Grade 4							
1992	23%	26%	25%	35%	23%	22%	25%
2003	26%	32%	33%	39%	31%	26%	37%
Current Rank	Tied – 40th	Tied – 24th	Tied – 16th	4th	Tied – 30th	Tied – 40th	Tied – 5th
NAEP Reading Grade 8							
1998	26%	N/A	31%	N/A	29%	22%	30%
2003	26%	32%	29%	37%	34%	24%	36%
Current Rank	Tied – 38th	Tied – 26th	34th	Tied – 6th	Tied – 19th	43rd	Tied – 12th
NAEP Math Grade 4							
1992	10%	18%	13%	25%	13%	13%	17%
2003	24%	34%	25%	39%	22%	32%	34%
Current Rank	Tied – 41st	Tied – 17th	Tied – 4th	Tied – 8th	46th	Tied – 26th	Tied – 17th
NAEP Math Grade 8							
1990	12%	16%	9%	21%	10%	15%	17%
2003	21%	28%	32%	33%	24%	26%	34%
Current Rank	Tied – 40th	Tied – 29th	Tied – 14th	Tied – 12th	Tied – 35th	Tied – 32nd	Tied – 10th
High School Graduation Rate							
Class of 1992	70%	74%	70%	86%	72%	61%	78%
Class of 1996	63%	71%	64%	87%	68%	56%	68%
Class of 2002	57%	78%	67%	89%	68%	53%	72%
Current Rank	48th	16th	37th	1st	35th	50th	29th
College Readiness Rate							
Class of 1992	26%	21%	26%	38%	27%	23%	29%
Class of 1996	30%	26%	30%	44%	32%	26%	28%
Class of 2002	31%	31%	37%	45%	37%	29%	34%
Evaluation of Accountability System							
Current Rank	86%/B Tied – 18th	89%/B+ Tied – 13th	83%/B Tied – 25th	86%/B Tied – 18th	94%/A Tied – 6th	94%/A Tied – 6th	84%/B Tied – 22nd
National Board Certified Teachers							
2004	133	168	8,282	99	731	3,865	205
Current Rank	36th	32nd	1st	39th	11th	3rd	26th

# Education Governors for the 21st Century

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## About the author

Ferrel Guillory is director of the Program on Southern Politics, Media and Public Life at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is on the faculty of the UNC School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Guillory also is a senior fellow at MDC Inc., a Chapel Hill-based nonprofit research organization, for which he has served as co-author of its five *State of the South* reports issued biennially since 1996. He has authored and co-authored numerous other reports and books and his freelance writing has appeared in *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, *America*, *Commonweal*, and several Southern newspapers and magazines.



### **James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership & Policy**

Founded by Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., in 2001, the mission of the James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy is to work with leaders to ensure America's future through quality education. As governor of North Carolina for 16 years, Hunt was successful in accomplishing comprehensive education reform in the state and is considered a national leader in education.

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*for* EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP *and* POLICY

University of North Carolina, PO Box 9380, Chapel Hill, NC 27515  
*Telephone* (919) 843-4085 *Facsimile* (919) 843-2557