

Beyond Permanent *Crisis*

Steps toward a new
institutional future for Los
Angeles Unified School
District



A view of the past and the future brought to you by sympathetic observers who have examined 40 years of reform efforts

- Charles Taylor Kerchner, Claremont Graduate University
- David Menefee-Libey, Pomona College
- Laura Mulfinger, Claremont Graduate University
- Stephanie Clayton, University of Southern California



Apocalyptic Visions

- **“This is the end of public education as we know it.”**
- Speaker at August, 2009 board meeting



The conventional wisdom: great plans with failed implementation


- Priorities in Education, 1986
- The Children Can No Longer Wait, 1989
- For All Our Children, 1993
- Superintendent's Call To Action 1995
- **"LEARN Failed," Richard Riordan**
- 100 Schools/10 Schools
- Superintendent's strategic plan, 2003, 2007
- The Schoolhouse, 2006



Unsuccessful Projects v. Changing Institutions

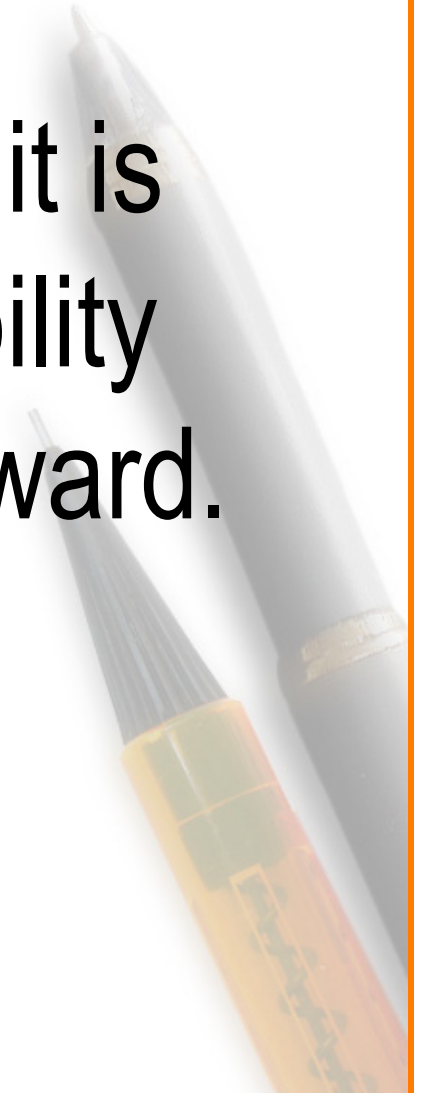
- 3-5 year projects can't change institutions
 - Lifecycle is too short
 - Standard operating procedures resist change
- But long wave institutional change has reshaped LAUSD and other school districts
 - “This book argues that urban education reform can best be understood as a process of institutional change rather than a series of failed projects.” *The Transformation of Great American School Districts*, p. 1.

What's an institution?

- Big chunky parts of society
 - economy, family, religion, education
 - Bounded by rules and codes of behavior
 - Capitalism, monogamy, creeds, school code
 - Transmitted by groups of organizations
 - firms, families, congregations, schools
- 

Ideas (and politics) change institutions

- In times of uncertainty it is ideas that provide stability for people to move forward.



Projects audition new ideas

Since 1986, all the big reform projects contain the same essential ideas.

- Decentralization
- Universal High Standards
- Greater grassroots involvement
- Variety in schooling and choice among schools



The ideas were intended to transform LAUSD

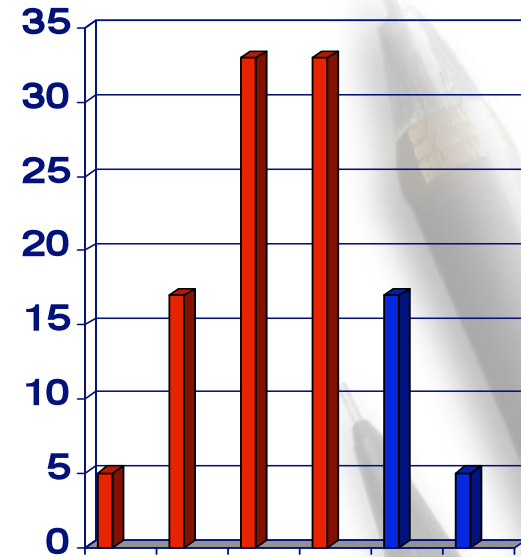
It is the beginning of a new system, a new process that free our local schools to make the changes necessary to improve themselves. It will recreate our neighborhood schools changing from a centralized command and control system to an output driven system.

Robert Wycoff, LEARN chair 1993

Departing from 1903 ideas

**Get the
Schools
Out Of
Politics**

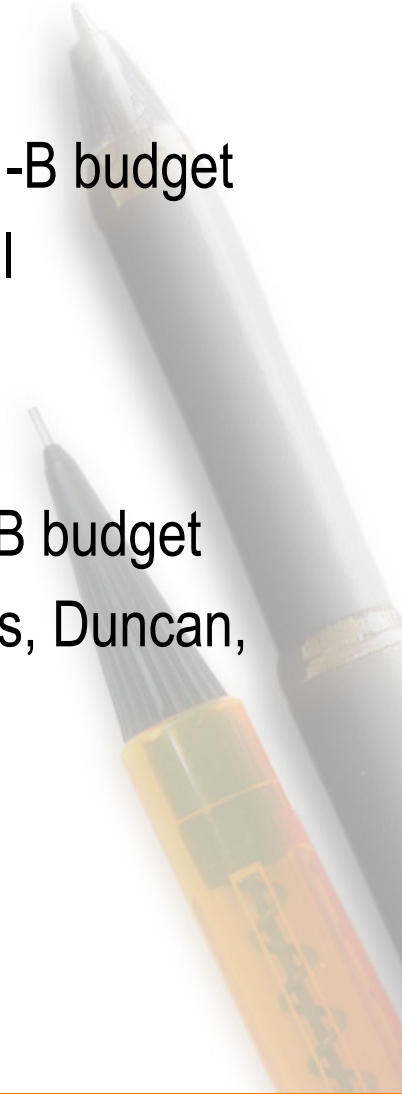
Let the
professionals
run things



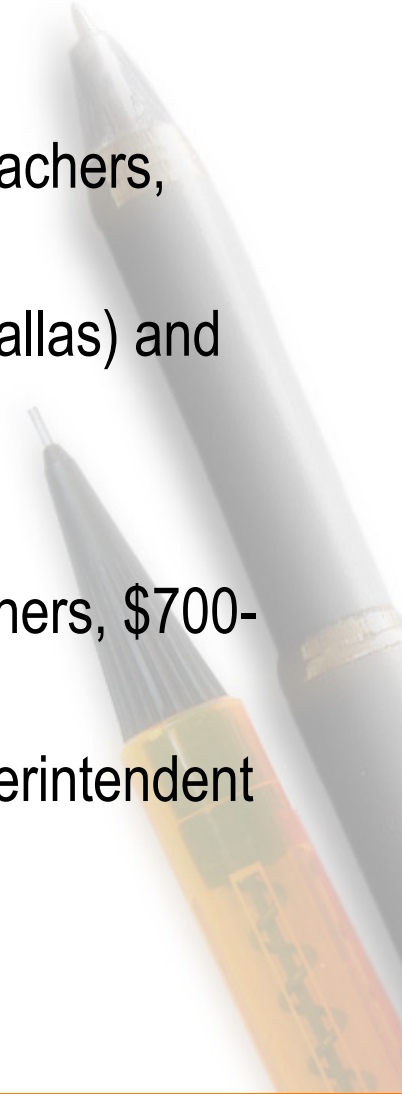
“Bell Curve” Expectations

Local Control

A Look at Some Other Cities

- New York:
 - 1.1 million students, 80,000 teachers, \$21-B budget
 - Strong mayor (Bloomberg), non-traditional chancellor (Klein)
 - Chicago
 - 418,000 students, 23,000 teachers, \$5.3-B budget
 - Strong mayor (Daley), outsider ceo (Vallas, Duncan, Huberman)
- 

A Look at Some Other Cities


- Philadelphia
 - 163,000 students, 284 schools, 10,000 teachers, \$2.19-B budget
 - Strong state appointed board, outsider (Vallas) and traditional (Ackerman) superintendents
 - Washington, DC
 - 45,000 students, 132 schools, 4,000 teachers, \$700-million budget
 - Strong Mayor (Fenty), non-traditional superintendent (Rhee), separate charter school board
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A Look at Some Other Cities

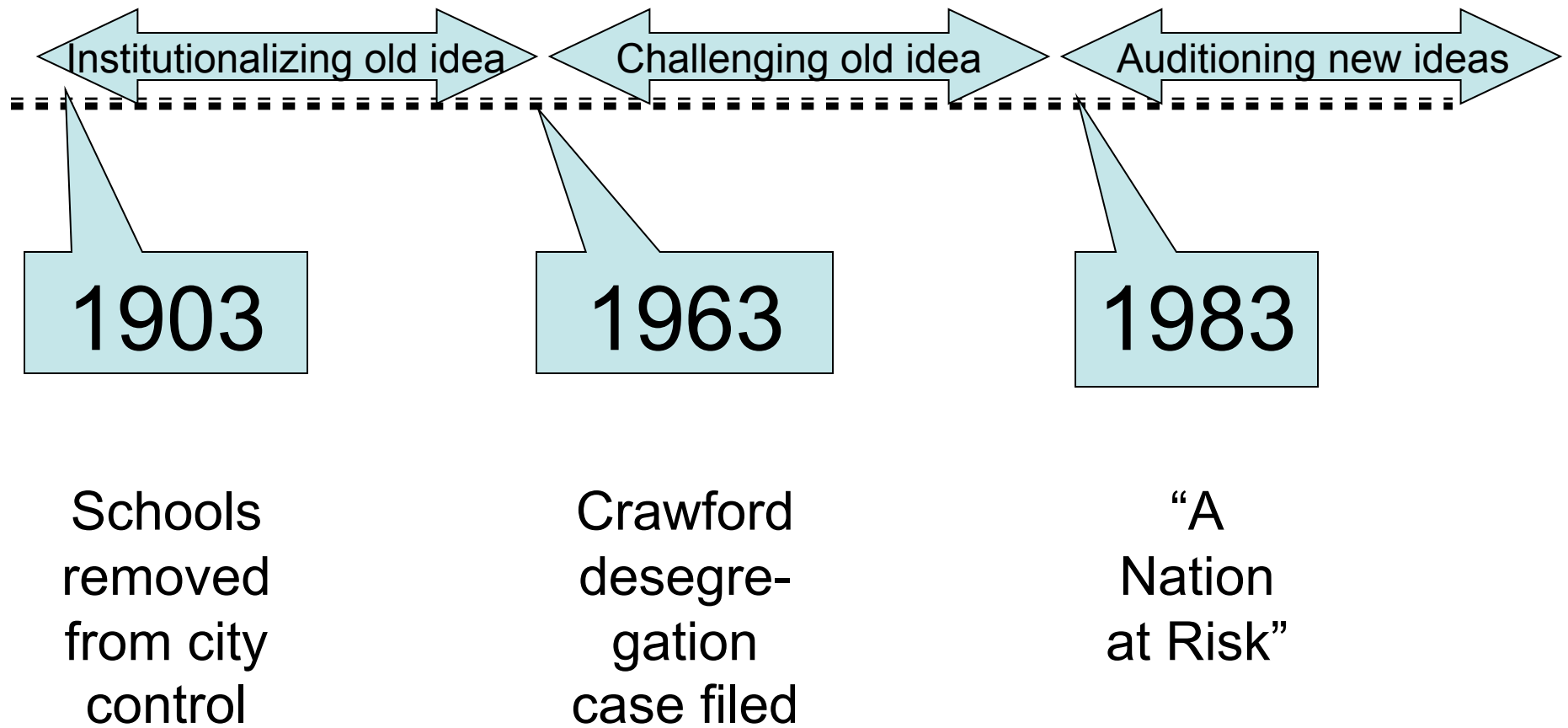
- New Orleans
 - about 35,000 (down from 70,000)
 - State takeover (Recovery School District) non-traditional superintendent (Vallas)
 - Most new schools are charters




Los Angeles Unified

- 617,000 students (down from 747,000 in 2002-2003), 685 schools, 45,000 teachers, \$19-B budget.
 - Weak mayor city, two former non-traditional superintendents
 - Largest charter enrollment in country, 59,000 in 155 charters
 - 177 Magnets
 - Pilot schools, Belmont zone of choice
 - Mayor controls ~~10~~ 11 schools
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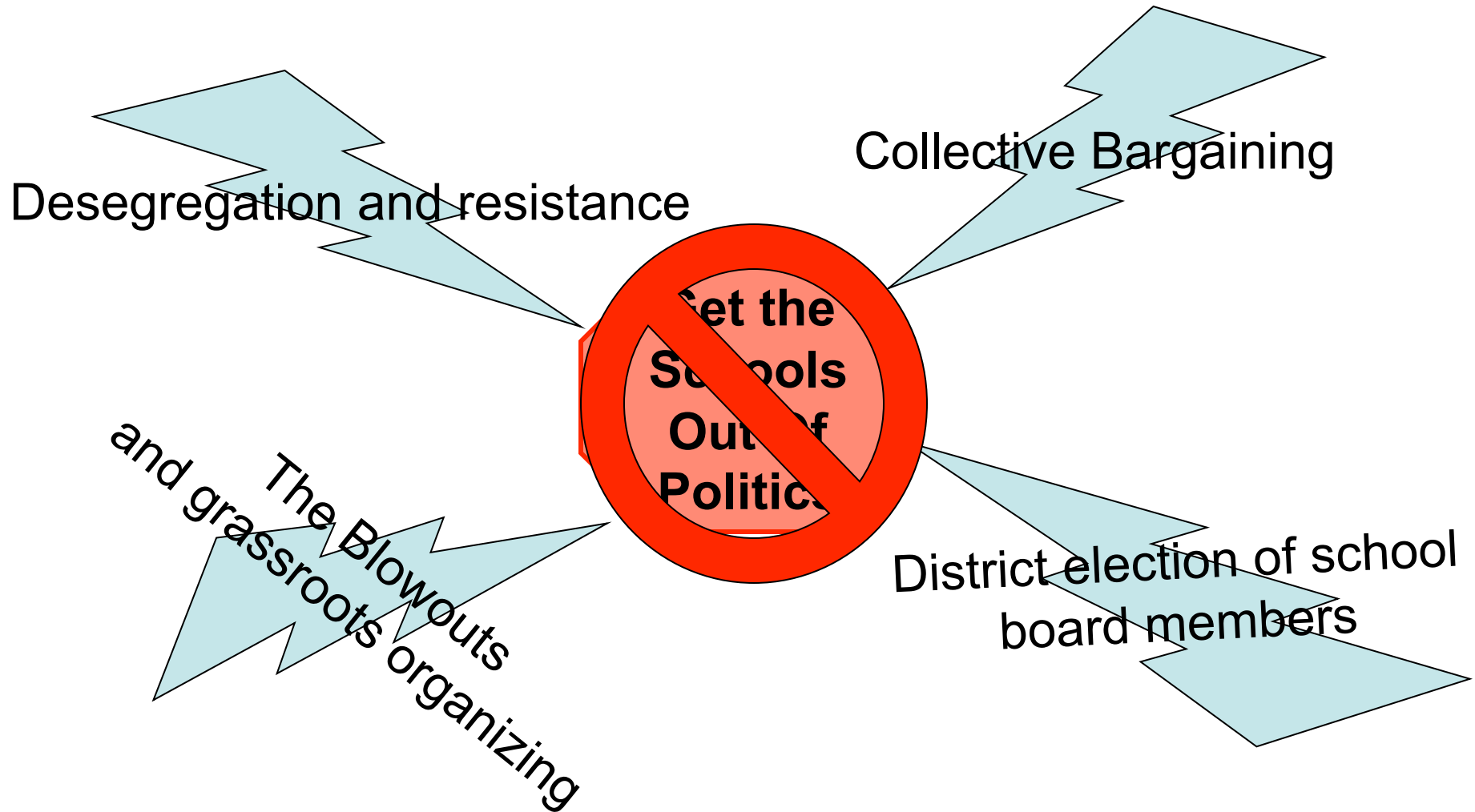
LA Historical Perspective



“Best in the West”

- 1919: L.A. school system, “is recognized throughout the U.S. and that visitors come to study it from other countries.”
 - 1937: children attain higher ability than at any former time. Vierling Kiersey, superintendent
 - 1958: High school students scored in top 27 percent nationally. Ellis Jarvis, superintendent.
 - 1966: State Assembly releases district-to-district test score results. LAUSD in bottom half.
 - 1967: “L.A. Students among Poorest Readers in the U.S., Tests Show,” L.A. Times
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After 1963: Populist politics returns



From local control to federal and state control

Sacramento



- Prop 13
- Activist state superintendent



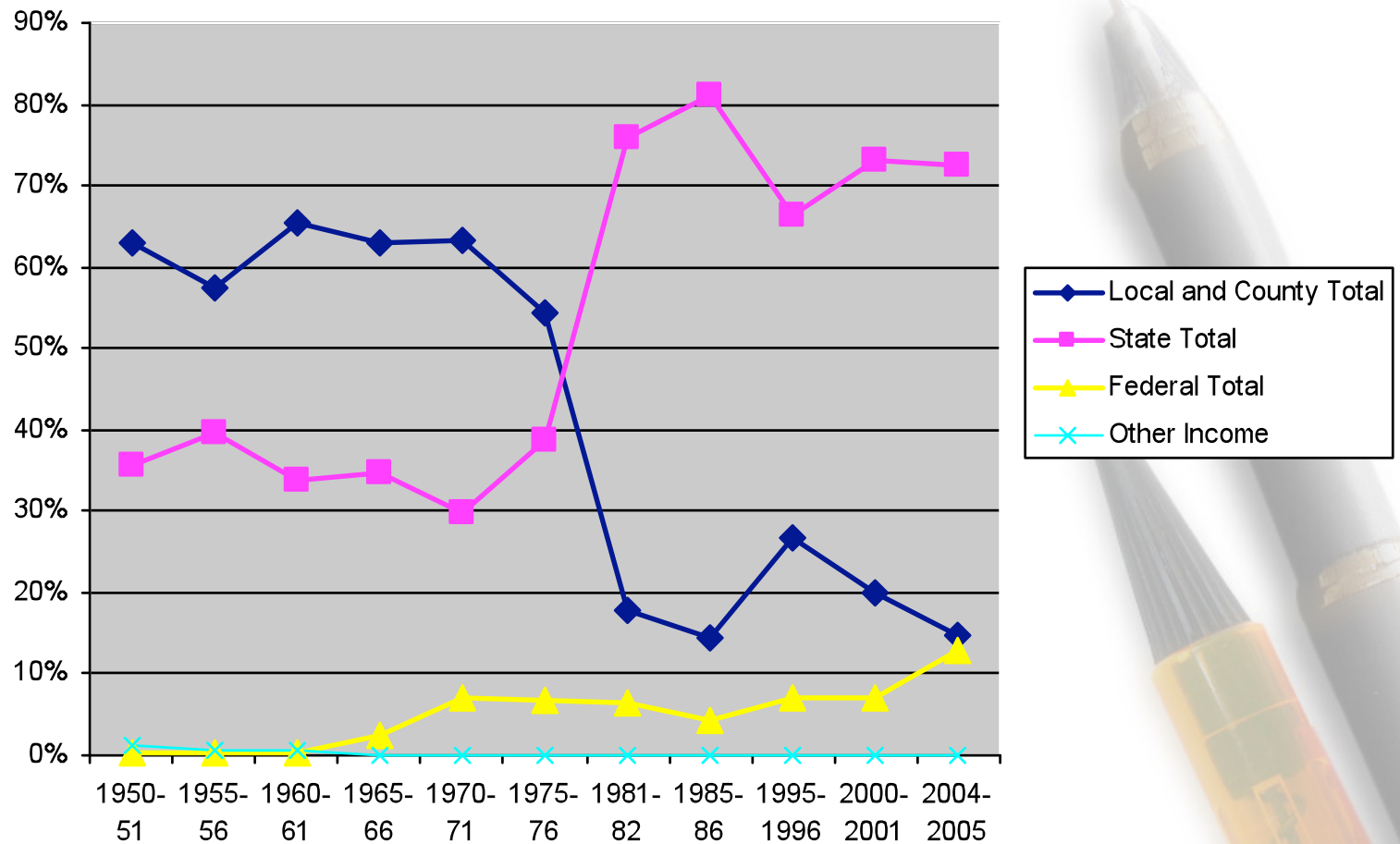
Washington



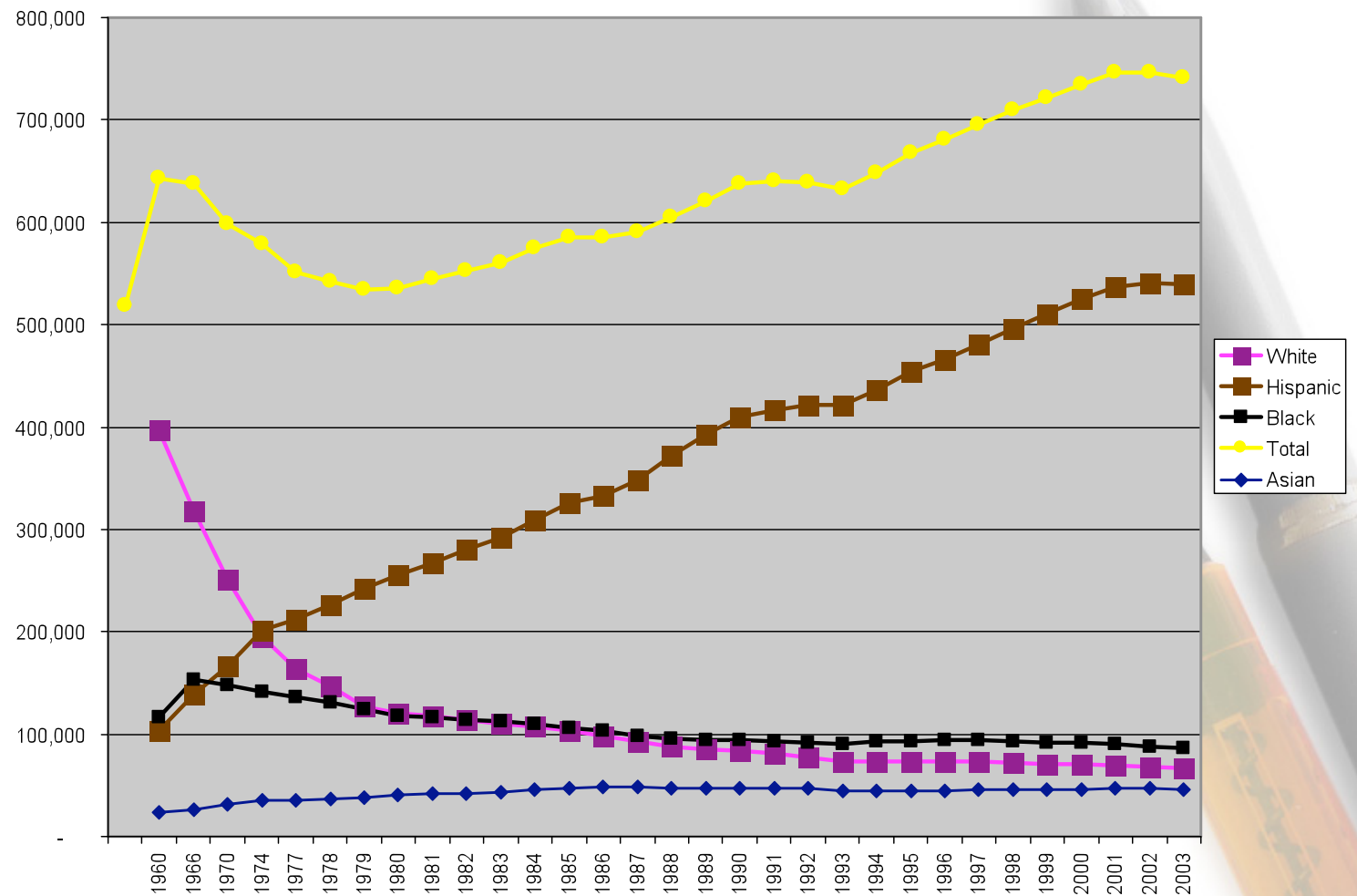
- Categorical programs, special ed
- Test targets

Decline of Local Control

LAUSD Income by Source



LAUSD enrollment by race, ethnicity

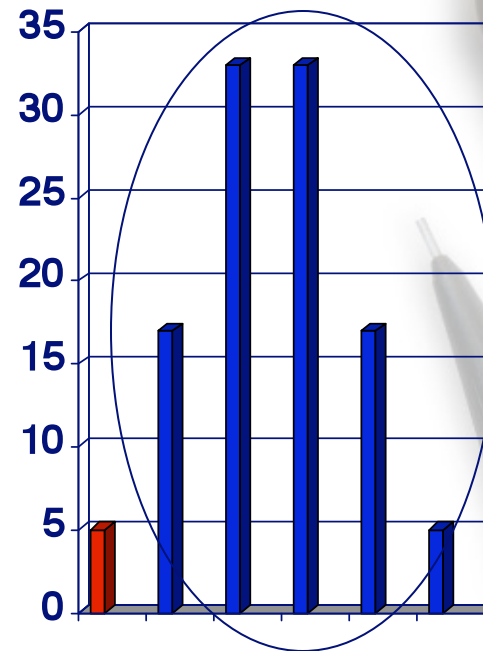


From 'Bell Curve' to High Standards

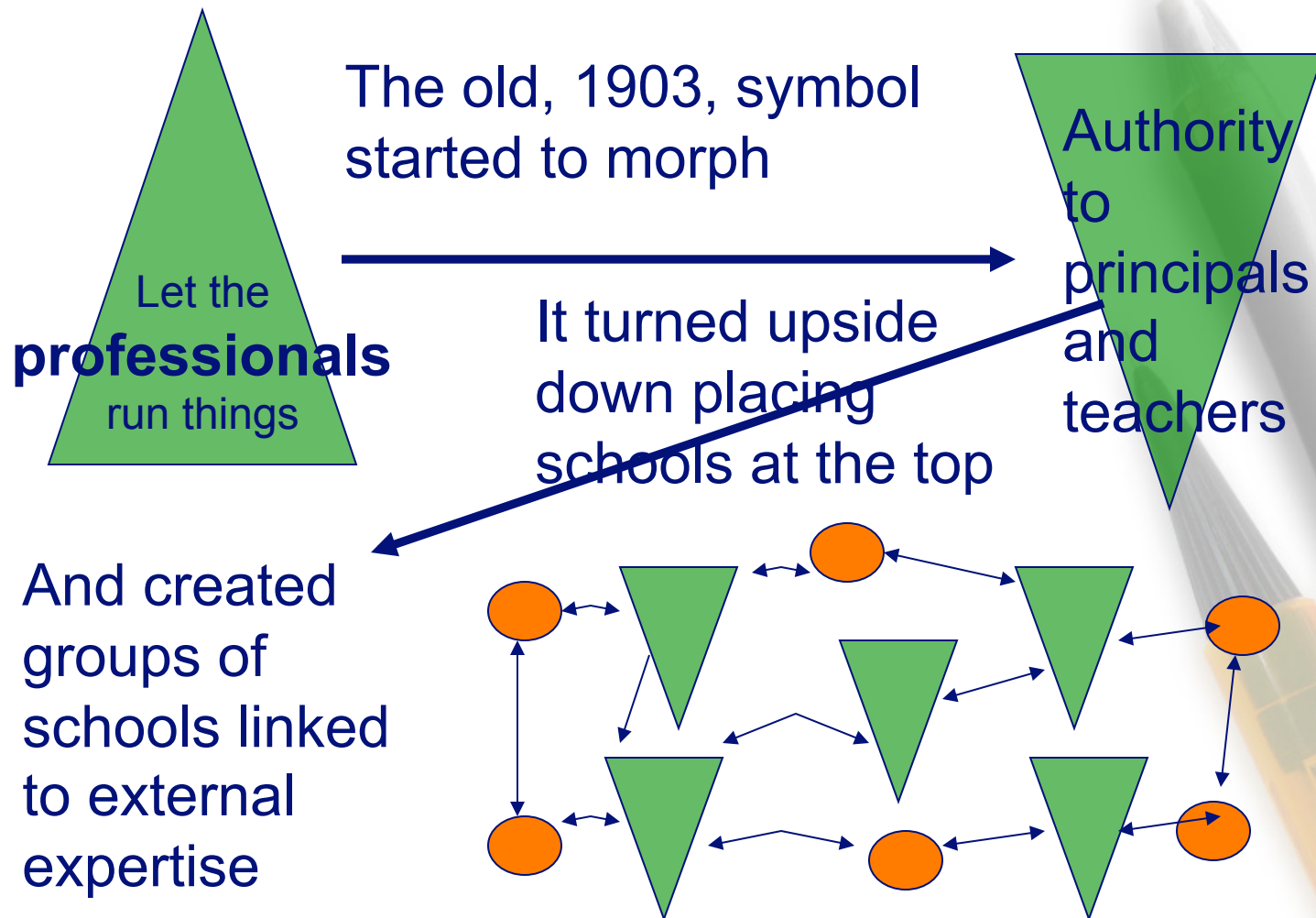
High performance for a few



High performance for many



From hierarchy to network



The 'Tools of Government' Approach

- Government is not constituted by public sector workers reporting to agencies, districts, and bureaus.
- Shifts attention from command and control to regulation and persuasion
- Social regulation, economic regulation, contracting, grants, loans, incentives, fees, liability law, government corporations, vouchers.
 - Salamon, Lester M. *Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*. Oxford University Press, 2002, p 8.

A Portfolio of Schools

- A school district (or other entity) assembles the best collection of schools it can. It operates some of them directly, it charters others, and engages in partnership arrangements for additional schools. The arrangement is not considered permanent but rather contingent on performance. The lowest performing schools are closed and reorganized, the best ones are copied and expanded. The search for improvement is relentless. At its core, the portfolio approach focuses on the school, rather than the district.
 - This description draws on unpublished work about the Chicago Public Schools by David Menefee-Libey, Pomona College.

By the time LEARN and LAAMP started, they were trying to reform a District that had lost its capacity


Delegitimation

- Desegregation, *Crawford* case
- Blowouts, 1968
- Public data on achievement
- Collective bargaining, 1970 strike, 1975 statute
- 1983, *A Nation at Risk*


Hollowing Out

- 1977, Proposition 13
- Categorical programs grow
- 1979, school board election by district
- State and federal education activism
 - 1964 Elementary and Secondary Education Act
 - 1982 Bill Honig election


1990s: The LEARN and LAAMP Era

- LEARN: A model of political organizing
 - A 'big-tent' civic coalition: business, labor, the superintendent.
 - Annenberg \$50 million gift financed continued reform
 - Focused attention on changing roles of parents, and spun off Families in Schools.
 - Messy, complex reforms
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1992: Parallel and Converging Charter School World

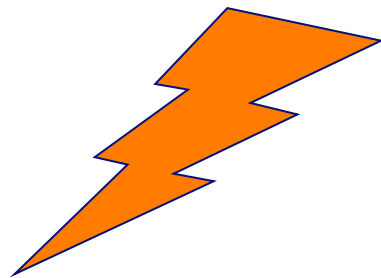
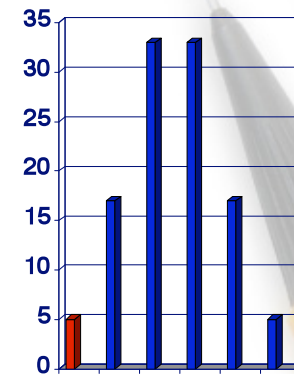
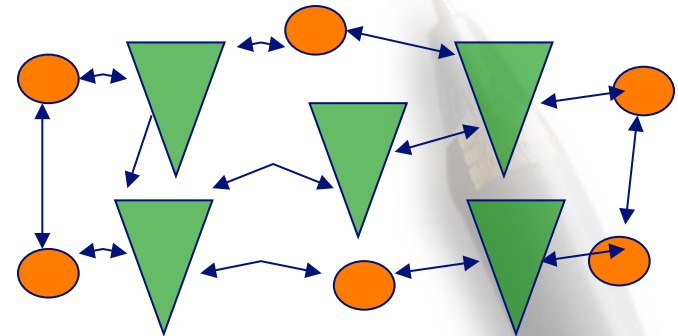
- With more than 100 schools, provided auditions of many of the same ideas that were contained in LAAMP and LEARN
 - Attracted the attention of some of the same civic and philanthropic leaders
 - Found public policy ‘solutions’ to some of the problems that had hampered reforms in the LAUSD
 - Getting funds directly to schools
 - Simplified school codes
 - Streamlined labor contracts
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Auditioning New Ideas


- Grassroots participation—over 600 people participated in the task groups that shaped LEARN; LAAMP organized robust parent participation
 - Decentralization—over half the schools in the District joined
 - Standards—by the end of the program, organization around standards
 - Choice and variety—magnets expand; charter schools start, SBM
- 

Gained knowledge of how to operate with these new ideas


- Networks of autonomous schools
- Variety and choice
- High standards for all
- Increased political participation at many levels



Why only an audition?

- Ultimately, LAAMP and LEARN foundered because their time horizon was too short.
 - And they foundered because they could not structure politics that would change the institution
 - Too local
 - Too “retail.”
 - They were unable to transition from movement politics to institutional change politics.
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Our conclusion: 5 policy levers for a new institution

1. Legislation to allow LAUSD to create autonomous sub-districts.
 2. Send money directly to schools.
 3. Create positive incentives for students, teachers and administrators.
 4. Invest in a technological infrastructure for student learning.
 5. Deliberately add a variety of learning options and support choice among them.
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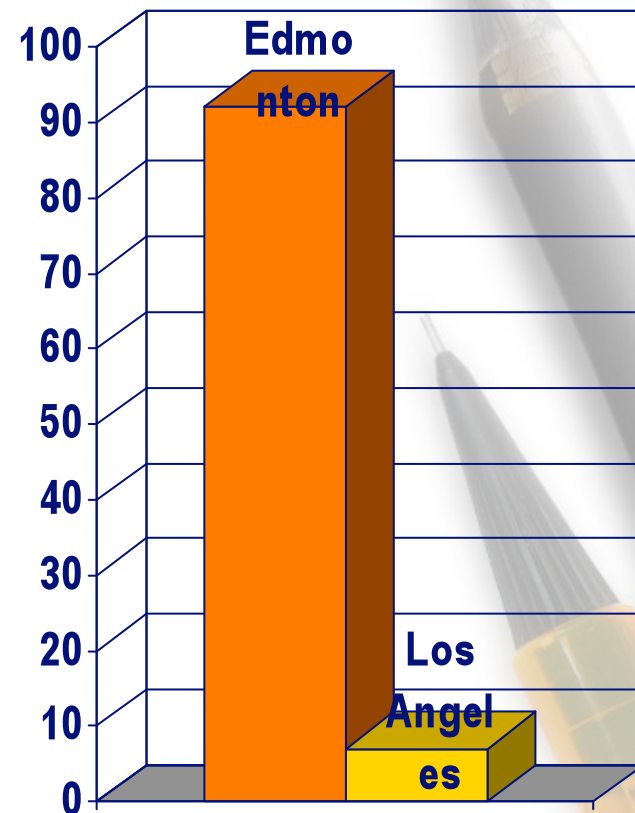
A new institution built around a network of schools

- A modern, efficient organizational form
- A way of resolving the paradox:
 - “Pilot projects don’t work in L.A.” Helen Bernstein
 - You can’t move the whole District at once.
- Political decisions worth working through
 - (A footnote on the Flores Aguilar resolution)



Deliver \$ to the schools

- Decentralization won't last unless flexible money is delivered to the schools.
- Break down the categorical silos.
- Weighted student formula will not solve overall shortages of funds, but we know that there are great differences in the performance of schools with similar resources.



Create positive incentives

- “What kind of country would create a major education policy made of almost entirely of negative incentives?”
- Get beyond merit pay for teachers.
- The students are the real workers in this system.
 - Free higher education that is attractive and achievable.
 - ELL that produces fluency by the 5th grade.



Incentives for students

- College scholarships or free tuition
- Parallel technical training track
- Redesignation out of ELL
- Rewards attached to testing system.
- Ability to study directly for the tests.



Incentives for teachers

- Distinguishing between rewards and incentives.
- Tweak the salary schedule.
 - Pay for what you want
- Make the evaluation system rewarding.
- Use the contract.



A student learning infrastructure

- We can solve the equity access problems
- Current information to students and parents.
 - Example of A-G
- Direct communication with parents and students
 - Example of teacher web.
- Direct assistance to students
- Open source the curriculum
- Direct instruction
- Self-paced examination.



Variety and choice

- Deliberately changing learning modalities and styles
- Uses and limits to competition
- LAUSD already has the machinery for a sophisticated choice system, and a geographic one



Getting beyond permanent crisis

- Deliberately organize around the four reform elements.
- Structure politics to capture the levers of power in Sacramento and Washington
- Create a long term civic vision that is not dependent on a single person or administration

And that's what we
learned from L.A.

