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A Democratic Constitution for Public Education

Paul T. Hill, Ashley E. Jochim

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America's education system faces a stark dilemma: it needs governmental oversight, rules and regulations, but it also needs to be adaptable enough to address student needs and the many different problems that can arise at any given school—something that large educational bureaucracies are notoriously bad at. Paul Hill and Ashley Jochim offer here a solution that is brilliant for its simplicity and distinctly American sensibility: our public education system needs a constitution. Adapting the tried-and-true framework of our forefathers to the specific governance of education, they show that the answer has been part of our political DNA all along.

Most reformers focus on who should control education, but Hill and Jochim show that who governs is less important than determining what powers they have. They propose a Civic Education Council—a democratic body subject to checks and balances that would define the boundaries of its purview as well as each school's particular freedoms. They show how such a system would prevent regulations meant to satisfy special interests and shift the focus to the real task at hand: improving school performance. Laying out the implications of such a system for parents, students, teachers, unions, state and federal governments, and courts, they offer a vision of educational governance that stays true to—and draws on the strengths of—one of the greatest democratic tools we have ever created.

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