



## TOUGH LOVE FOR SCHOOLS

By Frederick M. Hess

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In the world of K–12 education, it’s hard to find anyone who will forthrightly declare that teachers are no more saintly than anyone else; that poor schools should be closed and lousy teachers should be fired; that philanthropy may sometimes do more harm than good; that teaching experience is not essential to being a school principal; that schools should be more efficient and cost-effective; or that profit-driven competition might be good for public education.

These are the kinds of “radical” ideas that Frederick Hess puts forth in this book of essays on school reform. He rejects the notion that loving schools means apologizing for them, and argues that “tough love” requires demanding more, not less, of the people and institutions we cherish. In *Tough Love for Schools* (AEI Press, January 2006), Hess insists that we must ask how schools can do more, rather than how they can get more, and that we be blunt and clear-eyed in our assessments of both schooling and proposed reforms.

Hess argues that real school reform requires new policies that enable public and private entrepreneurs to create new systems and new schools, improve school management, reward excellence, harness advances in technology and knowledge, and devise strategies to draw new talent into the field.

Through his essays in *Tough Love for School*, Hess explores the practical and political challenges of accountability, competition, excellence, and the public good. Addressing topics ranging from the federal No Child Left Behind Act to the racial politics of school reform to the relationship of philanthropy and schooling, Hess casts an unsparing eye on schooling and on school officials, would-be reformers, philanthropists, education professors, teacher unions, and public officials.

This collection includes updated and revised versions of influential essays on issues such as mayoral control of public schools, the challenge of accountability systems, who should teach, and what it takes for school choice to create real competition.

In an era when thinkers on the Right and Left agree that America’s future depends heavily on our teachers and schools, Hess offers bracing straight talk on what we must

do, assessing the challenges and opportunities that reformers must confront. Disdaining both jargon and sentimentality, Hess has penned a volume for people who are ready to think seriously and talk honestly about the road ahead.

**Frederick M. Hess** is a resident scholar and the director of educational policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. He is the executive editor of *Education Next* and a research associate in the education policy and governance program at Harvard University. Formerly a public high school teacher in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a professor of education at the University of Virginia, he holds an M.Ed. in Education and a Ph.D. in Government from Harvard University. His previous books include *Spinning Wheels*, *Revolution at the Margins*, and *Common Sense School Reform*.

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## What education experts say about *Tough Love for Schools*:

“This penetrating collection tackles the toughest issues in education with the author’s trademark verve, honesty, and insight. Skewering much conventional wisdom, Rick Hess provides no-nonsense guidance on the substance and tactics of school reform. This volume is a must-read for policymakers, practitioners, and parents serious about leaving no child behind.”

—Roderick R. Paige, former secretary of education

“Few people writing about public schools understand the workings of the federal government and national politics as well as Rick Hess. For those of us often confused about how politicians and bureaucrats treat our schools, particularly the fantasies enshrined in the No Child Left Behind law by very smart and well-meaning public servants, *Tough Love for Schools* is a refreshing splash of clarity and good sense. Hess capably summarizes all sides in this national argument, and proves pretty conclusively that the old self-protective instincts of all the major interest groups have gotten us stuck, and forced us to look for new ways to help kids learn.”

—Jay Mathews, *Washington Post* education reporter and columnist

“In these lucid and engaging essays, one of America’s keenest education analysts builds a powerful case for the reforms that our schools most urgently need—and most stubbornly resist.”

—Chester E. Finn Jr., president, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

“Rick Hess rejects the easy answers and warm fuzziness of policies based on ‘high hopes’ and good intentions as well as the conventional wisdom of both educators and their critics. His tough-minded analyses of accountability, school choice, curricular debates, and the preparation of teachers and principals go beyond the anecdotal in redefining—for scholars, politicians, policymakers, and the media—what it means to care passionately about the fate of the public schools. As clear as they are scholarly, the essays in *Tough Love for Schools* show once again that Hess’s fresh and fearless thinking about education defies categorization.”

—Richard Lee Colvin, director, Hechinger Institute on Education and The Media, Teachers College, Columbia University