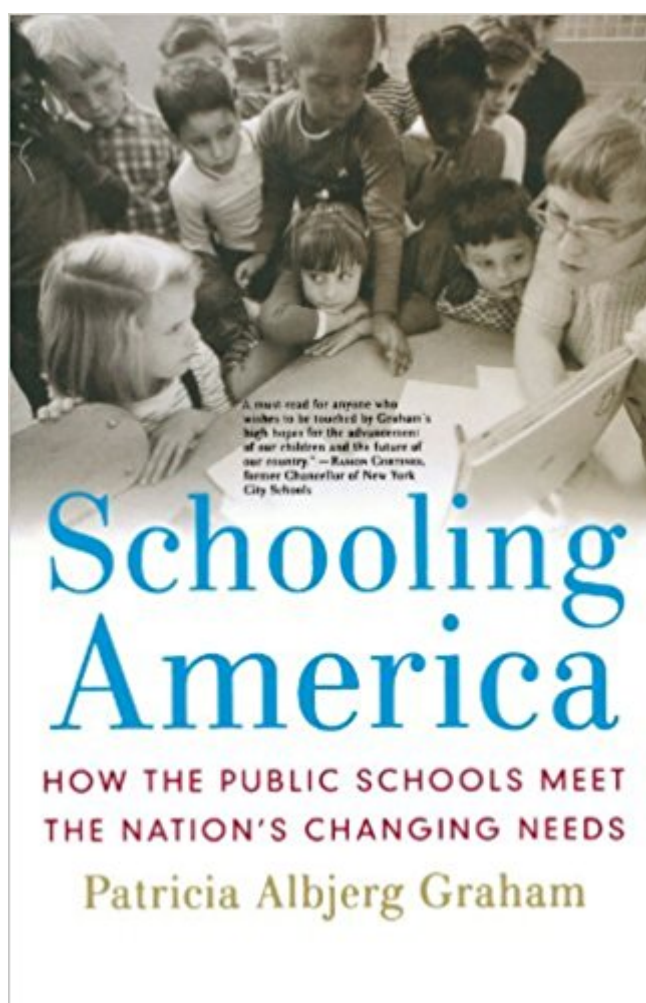


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# Schooling America: How The Public Schools Meet The Nation's Changing Needs (Institutions Of American Democracy)



## Synopsis

In this informative volume, Patricia Graham, one of America's most esteemed historians of education, offers a vibrant history of American education in the last century. Drawing on a wide array of sources, from government reports to colorful anecdotes, Graham skillfully illustrates Americans' changing demands for our schools, and how schools have responded by providing what critics want, though never as completely or as quickly as they would like. In 1900, as waves of immigrants arrived, the American public wanted schools to assimilate students into American life, combining the basics of English and arithmetic with emphasis on patriotism, hard work, fair play, and honesty. In the 1920s, the focus shifted from schools serving a national need to serving individual needs; education was to help children adjust to life. By 1954 the emphasis moved to access, particularly for African-American children to desegregated classrooms, but also access to special programs for the gifted, the poor, the disabled, and non-English speakers. Now Americans want achievement for all, defined as higher test scores. While presenting this intricate history, Graham introduces us to the passionate educators, scholars, and journalists who drove particular agendas, as well as her own family, starting with her immigrant father's first day of school and ending with her own experiences as a teacher. Invaluable background in the ongoing debate on education in the United States, this book offers an insightful look at what the public has sought from its educational institutions, what educators have delivered, and what remains to be done.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Our elementary, secondary, and higher education sectors are getting better, just not as rapidly or as completely as we would like." This guardedly optimistic assessment of the last century of American education characterizes Graham's erudite consideration of our nation's public schools. As an educator whose 50-year career has taken her from teaching social studies in Dismal Swamp, Virginia, to the deanship of the Harvard faculty of education and the directorship of the National Institute of Education, Graham's ability to speak from direct experience, whether about the tension between theory and practice in curricular reform, the struggle to diversify schools, or the effects of research funding on higher education, makes for a consistently engaging read, even if the topics discussed, on the surface, sound dry. Although her opinions on how America's educational system can improve seep into the writing, these are less central to the book than her lively retelling of developments in the public school system since 1900. Whether or not one shares her commitment to diversity and vision of education's role in shaping society, the historical material here will be of great interest to professional educators, policymakers and parents of school-age children. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"One of the country's most respected historians of education presents a compelling picture of how and why American schooling changed over the last, tumultuous century. Using a wide range of sources, from government reports to personal anecdotes, the former dean of Harvard University's graduate school of education shows readers how historical forces such as immigration, industrialization, and the civil rights movement shaped and reshaped the public's expectations of what schools should be and how they should operate. Her historical insights provide a valuable backdrop for the study of current debates."--Education Week

"Schooling America is an admirably informative, sensible and balanced account of how schools and colleges in the United States have developed since 1900, written by one of the most informed and thoughtful scholars of education in the United States."--Derek Bok, President Emeritus, Harvard University

"A thoughtful, insightful analysis by a brilliant scholar and educational leader. Must reading for everyone who cares about our public schools."--Donna Shalala, President, University of Miami

"In her provocative and tremendously optimistic book on American education, Pat Graham provides a wonderful history of education reform and does not stop there. Rather than focusing on the failings of our school system, she celebrates the promise of youth and challenges us to be bold in our thinking as we go forward. Schooling America is a must-read for anyone who wishes to be touched by Graham's high hopes

for the advancement of our children and the future of our country."--Ramon Cortines, former Chancellor of New York City Schools"A welcome, concise and readable history of American schooling and our ceaseless efforts to change it, well presented by an eminent education historian."--Chester E. Finn, Jr., Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University; President, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation"An outstanding and immensely readable book about values and opportunity in America dressed in the cloth of education history. Pat Graham again demonstrates her scholarship, clear insight and the priority and hope she always reserves for children whom we have historically failed in our schools."--David Hornbeck, President, Children's Defense Fund"Pat Graham ably and eloquently reminds us that public education is a constantly unfolding national commitment and that the duties and responsibilities of educators, policymakers, parents, students and citizens evolve and respond to shifting political, social, economic, and ideological forces. Schooling America, written by a keen-eyed observer and analyst, draws the reader into a guided journey that explores how our nation's schools are adapting to the challenge, and unfulfilled promise, of providing universal, free, and high-quality public education for every child in every classroom."--Wendy D. Puriefoy, President, Public Education Network"Schooling America is a readable, intelligent, and well-informed synthesis of the history of American education."--Diane Ravitch, Research Professor of Education, New York University; author of *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*

This is one of the most readable histories of American (public) education I have yet read. Graham, a historian of education and former public school teacher, breaks the history of American education down into roughly four (aliterative) phases: assimilation (until the 1910's), adjustment (until about 1950), Access (until around 1980), and Achievement (to present). (She also includes a chapter on the increasing role of university education, called "Autonomy to Accountability"). Each of these phases was, in some sense, an instance of public schools trying to adjust to the changing needs of the nation. Assimilation - where schools' primary function was to 'Americanize' - was brought about by an influx of immigration from Europe. Adjustment - where education was to be made more relevant and mindful of children's interests - was brought about by schools' goal of trying to keep an ever-expanding number of students (thanks to compulsory ed laws) interested in schools. Access was the goal when various groups - African-American, the disabled, foreign students for whom English was a second language and American was a second culture - worked to make sure that they all received quality (and integrated) schooling. Lastly, Achievement was brought about by increasing awareness that student learning was declining and what this might mean for America's

place in the world; schools, therefore, needed higher standards, and learning would be measured by achievement on standards-based tests. Be mindful that, while easy to read and concise, this book is quite shot through with the author's opinions... and that those opinions are somewhat educationally "conservative" à la Diane Ravitch or E.D. Hirsch. Not "conservative" in the sense of being critical of public schools generally or wanting to see privatization and markets in schooling, but "conservative" in the sense of believing more in schools' assimilationist and achievement mission than in their adjustment mission. That is, it becomes quite evident that Graham is no fan of the progressive trends in education from the 1920's on, or on schools' increasing focus on vocational training.... and definitely not that increasing role that educational "tracking" has played since the 1920's. For better or worse, one gets the feeling that had Graham her way, we'd see schools return (in terms of curriculum, not administration) to the way schools were in the 1890's - focused on the 3 R's and giving students instruction whose purpose is to bring students into a shared American culture. One thing, in fact, I was concerned with in this book is that a good half of it seems somewhat inconsistent with its subtitle, exploring how the public schools meet the nation's changing needs. That is, from the progressive era to the 1950's (and even beyond that, when talking about American schools' increasing focus on vocational education), Graham writes as if the schools were not meeting the needs of the nation at all. Mostly, she writes as if schools were meeting what academics in education schools and the administrators who looked to them mistakenly thought the nation's needs were. Focus on education being congruent with student interests, and vocational training, took focus away from strong academic skills and educating people to think (rather than do specific "real world" tasks). As the author tells it, the nation got back on track, to a certain degree, with the standards movements brought about by reports like *A Nation At Risk*. (For the record, she has grave doubts about increased focus on standardized tests and exaggerating the "crisis" in American public schools, but believes that at least the focus is in the right place.) [Another small concern I have is that, to my mind, the author is VERY naive about the role politics plays in American education, often talking about political debates about school policy as "public debates" and legislation doing what legislators want as "doing what the people want." I am much more skeptical than the author about the congruence of what politicians do with what "the people" want, and likely because of that, much less rosy-eyed about whether public schools succeed in meeting "the nation's" needs, or even whether "the nation's needs" are homogeneous enough to be met through a single set of institutions like public schools. While that is a difference of opinion, it is one that explains why I disagreed with the author's assessment fairly often.] But honestly, I still give the book four stars, because it is a highly readable and (if we take opinions out)

accurate broad assessment of the history of public schooling in America. While there are no footnotes - as it is intended to be a popular work - there is a helpful list of suggested readings (thorough, but maybe a bit skewed). Those who want an interesting and thought provoking history of American public education should DEFINITELY read Graham's account. (And if you want a different and maybe more pessimistic perspective, balance it with Joel Spring's textbook, "The American School.")

Good content, awfully written. Adverbs were annoyingly overused.

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