WASHINGTON, D.C.—Performance accountability has been the dominant trend in education policy reform since the 1970s. State and federal policies set standards for what students should learn; require students to take “high-stakes” tests to measure what they have learned; and then hold students, schools, and school districts accountable for their performance. The goal of these policies is to push public school districts to ensure that all students reach a common threshold of knowledge and skills. The new book *High-Stakes Reform* analyzes the political processes and historical context that led to the enactment of state-level education accountability policies across the country.

Author Kathryn A. McDermott investigates the unique model of this education movement—perhaps the most visible form of public performance accountability—by situating it in the broader context of public administration research. The primary justification of these performance accountability policies in education has been equity, a driving force behind other civil rights policies and a goal whose pathways need better understanding. Additionally, education is one of the few areas to have such a high level of shared (though often contested) authority between federal, state, and local governments. The book focuses on three in-depth case studies of policy development in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Connecticut. McDermott zeroes in on the most controversial and politically charged forms of state performance accountability sanctions, including graduation tests, direct state intervention in or closing of schools, and state takeovers of school districts.

Public debate casts performance accountability as either a cure for the problems of US public education or a destructive mistake. Kathryn McDermott expertly navigates both sides of the debate detailing why particular policies became popular, how the assumptions behind the policies influenced the forms they took, and what practitioners and scholars can learn from the successes and failures of education accountability policies. Jeffrey R. Henig, of Teachers College, Columbia University, praises the book, saying, “Accountability and standards are the new language of education reform, and states are the lynchpins in the accountability movement. *High-Stakes Reform* shows how these threads are interwoven. Kathryn McDermott is an excellent guide, attentive to theories of governance and management but grounded also in cases of practice where simple-sounding ideas confront historical and organizational complexities.”

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