INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS, POLITICS, AND GOOD FAITH: A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM IN MASSACHUSETTS*

Rachel Wainer Apter**

INTRODUCTION .................................................. 622
I. SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND LEGAL HISTORY OF SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM IN MASSACHUSETTS . 627
A. THE EARLY YEARS ........................................ 627
B. McDUFFY AND THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 1993 .................................................. 629
1. The Litigation............................................. 629
   a. Plaintiff's strategy ................................ 629
   b. Defendant's strategy .............................. 631
   c. Executive branch .................................. 632
   d. Stipulation of facts and conditions in the plaintiff districts ..................... 634
   e. Briefs of the parties .............................. 635
   f. At the Supreme Judicial Court ................... 636
2. The Legislation ............................................ 638
   a. Facts on the ground ............................... 638
   b. Jack Rennie and the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) ........ 639
   c. The Legislature and Governor Weld .......... 641
3. The Influence of the Court on the Legislative Outcome and Vice Versa ............................. 644
   a. The impact of McDuffy on the Education Reform Act .................................. 644
   b. The impact of the Education Reform Act on McDuffy .................................. 645
C. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT AND THE ROAD TO Hancock .................. 646
D. Hancock v. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION ........ 649

* Ed. This Article was written in the Spring of 2007, and its contents are current as of March 2008.
** Law Clerk to the Honorable Jed S. Rakoff, United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. J.D., Harvard Law School, 2007. The author would like to thank Professors James Ryan and Martha Minow for reviewing and commenting on drafts of this Article and for sharing invaluable insights and advice. Also, thank you to everyone who was interviewed for this Article for their time and cooperation.

621
INTRODUCTION

School finance litigation has become one of the primary tools of education advocates to address the racial achievement gap and improve educational opportunities for poor and minority children. It is only more important in the wake of the Supreme Court's recent decision in Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, which prohibits the use of race-based student assignment plans to integrate local
school districts.\(^1\) Yet even before the Supreme Court limited local districts' options for racially integrating public schools, the focus of advocates at the state level had largely turned away from racial integration and toward money.\(^2\) Since 1973, lawsuits challenging state methods for funding public schools have been brought in forty-five states.\(^3\) Many of the early suits focused on equity, claiming that reliance on the local property tax to fund public education, coupled with varying property values across a state, created vast disparities in funding available to local school districts and violated state constitutional Equal Protection Clauses.\(^4\) More recent cases have focused on adequacy, claiming that these funding disparities mean that many districts cannot provide their students with the education required under state constitutional Education Clauses.\(^5\)

Although school finance litigation relies on the power of courts to create social change and to improve educational outcomes for individual students, not enough is known about the power or desire of courts to create such change in the face of legislative or popular opposition, or the relationship between court action and actual change on the ground. This Article explores this important issue through the lens of one state's experience with school finance litigation. By examining the legal, political, and social history of school finance reform in Massachusetts through personal interviews with many of its most important players, this Article reveals that before intervening in education reform, courts consider both their own institutional capacity to produce change and the efforts made by the elected branches of government to comply with the constitutional mandate. This holds important implications for advocates seeking to use the law to change educational outcomes and to produce any type of social reform.


\(^5\) Peter Enrich provides a nuanced explanation of the three "waves" in school finance litigation. \textit{Id.} According to Enrich, traditional equity claims are based solely on state Equal Protection Clauses, arguing that the clauses forbid differences in the fiscal capacity of local school districts. \textit{Id.} at 106–07. Other equity claims are based on both state Education and Equal Protection Clauses, arguing that the state Education Clause recognizes a fundamental right to an education which cannot be violated by differences in district fiscal capacity. \textit{Id.} at 107. Both types of suits claim a right to equal treatment: equal educational opportunity, equal funding for education, or equal capacity to raise funds for education. \textit{Id.} at 108. Traditional adequacy claims are based on state Education Clauses and argue that students have a substantive right to public schooling and that their constitutional right to education is being violated by the poor quality of educational services in their districts. \textit{See id.} at 108–10.
In 1993, in *McDuffy v. Secretary of Executive Office of Education*, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts found that the Education Clause of the Massachusetts constitution imposed an enforceable duty on the Commonwealth "to provide education in the public schools for the children there enrolled, whether they be rich or poor and without regard to the fiscal capacity of the community or district in which such children live."\(^6\) It defined the constitutional duty by adopting seven capabilities that an educated child must possess.\(^7\) Three days after the court’s decision, then-Governor William Weld signed the Education Reform Act of 1993 (ERA).\(^8\) The Act provided for a massive, progressive refinancing of public education in Massachusetts in exchange for high standards and accountability from students, teachers, and schools.\(^9\) In 1999, on the eve of the full implementation of the progressive funding scheme, the *McDuffy* plaintiffs filed for additional relief.\(^10\) They claimed that the Commonwealth was still not providing them with the education required by the Massachusetts constitution as defined by the seven *McDuffy* capabilities.\(^11\) A superior court judge found that the plaintiff districts were not providing students with the education to which they were constitutionally entitled and recommended a costing-out study to determine how much it would cost to provide all children with an adequate education.\(^12\) In *Hancock v. Commissioner of Education*, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court adopted the judge’s findings and praised her report but found that the Commonwealth was not violating its constitutional duty to provide plaintiff children with an education.\(^13\)

---


\(^7\) Id. at 554. These capabilities were originally declared in the famous Kentucky school finance case, *Rose v. Council for Better Education*, 790 S.W.2d 186 (Ky. 1989). They include: "(i) sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization; (ii) sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable students to make informed choices; (iii) sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation; (iv) sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness; (v) sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage; (vi) sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields so as to enable each child to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and (vii) sufficient level of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics or in the job market." *McDuffy*, 615 N.E.2d at 554 (quoting *Rose*, 790 S.W.2d at 212).

\(^8\) Peter J. Howe, *Weld Puts Lukewarm Pen to Education Reform Bill*, BOSTON GLOBE, June 19, 1993, at 1.

\(^9\) See infra Part I.B.2.

\(^10\) See infra note 174 and accompanying text.


\(^13\) Hancock, 822 N.E.2d at 1136–39.
Part I of this Article provides a comprehensive social, political, and legal history of school finance reform in Massachusetts, focusing primarily on McDuffy, Hancock, and the ERA. This history reveals that the Massachusetts school finance experience is unique in a number of respects. First, McDuffy remains the only school finance case in the country to be decided on the basis of a stipulated factual record submitted by the parties. Second, the ERA, which comprehensively reformed school financing in the Commonwealth, was passed by the Massachusetts legislature not in response to an order from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, but one week before McDuffy was even decided. The McDuffy court was mindful of the legislative action and state legislators were mindful of the court case; thus, the litigation and lobbying can only be understood in concert. Similarly, the Hancock court has not had the last word on school funding or education reform. Current Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick expressed his commitment to reviewing the school finance system while on the campaign trail and has recently announced education reform proposals that would be the system’s biggest overhaul since the ERA.

Part II discusses three main factors that help explain the Hancock decision. First, the court was aware of its own institutional constraints and concerns regarding the judiciary’s role. It intentionally chose not to impose a remedial order that would require the legislature to appropriate additional funds for education because it feared provoking interbranch conflict. The court was not concerned with constraints on courts generally, but its particular constraints due to its own previous clashes with the Massachusetts legislature over gay marriage and campaign finance reform, the difficulty of crafting remedies in school finance cases, and the lack of political support for the plaintiffs’ case. This explains the second factor. The court’s concerns regarding its judicial role reflected its implicit, and correct, assumption that policy elites, the legislature, the

15 See infra Part I.B.2.
16 See infra Part I.B.3.
18 Robert Keogh, the editor of CommonWealth Magazine, picked up on this concern, stating that the justices indicated that they did not want to get “bogged down” in the “quagmire” of issuing orders that they could not enforce. Audio recording: Hancock vs. Driscoll: How Much is Enough, sponsored by MassINC (Dec. 9, 2004), available at http://forum.wgbh.org/wgbh/forum.php?lecture_id=1719.
executive branch, and the public at large were generally uninterested in investing substantial new money in underperforming school districts. Stated otherwise, any fear of provoking inter-branch conflict or concern regarding the implementation of a judicial remedy would have been irrelevant if there had been substantial political support for the remedies the plaintiffs sought. Third, the court believed that the political branches had acted in good faith to increase state spending, minimize funding disparities between districts, and improve education in plaintiff districts. It accepted the story, shared by many in the Commonwealth, that Massachusetts schools had once been severely under-funded, but under the ERA, which had been encouraged and influenced by McDuffy, state spending on education had dramatically increased, disparities between districts had been reversed or reduced, and remaining problems in underperforming schools could no longer be traced to a lack of funds.

Part III discusses Hancock’s important implications for the efficacy of courts in producing social change and for plaintiffs contemplating school finance lawsuits. A number of scholars, including Gerald Rosenberg and Michael Klarman, have suggested that courts cannot produce significant social change in the face of popular opposition. Some scholars have claimed that this is particularly true in the area of school finance reform, where remedies such as increased funding for public schools and programmatic improvements are notoriously difficult for courts to enforce. McDuffy suggests partial, nuanced support for these theories. While the McDuffy court cannot be credited with creating social change in the face of legislative or popular opposition, the existence of the lawsuit influenced the ERA and the broader politics of education reform in the Commonwealth, just as the decision was in turn influenced by political action. Hancock, on the other hand, points in a direction that has been less explored: regardless of a court’s capacity to produce social change, a court might be unwilling to produce change out of fear of provoking inter-branch conflict if it believes that there is little support for change within the political branches. This highlights the importance of the interactive relationship between litigation and legislation, especially in the school finance context.

19 Audio tape: Oral Argument, Hancock, 822 N.E.2d 1134 (No. SJC-09267) [hereinafter Audio tape of Hancock Oral Argument] (on file with author). During oral argument, Chief Justice Margaret Marshall explicitly stated that the Massachusetts Department of Education had proceeded in good faith. Id.


22 Facts developed for the litigation, especially, helped to create an awareness of the funding problem and a sense that something had to be done. See infra Part I.B.3.
As for implications for future school finance litigation, Hancock shows that courts may be unwilling to find constitutional liability in states where the political branches have engaged in a serious, sustained effort to improve education and reduce spending disparities between districts. This is especially true when, like in Massachusetts, the effort has been met with a fair amount of success state wide. Therefore, advocates should be wary of bringing school finance suits in states where there is a perception that the political branches have acted in good faith to fulfill their constitutional obligations. This remains true even when students in plaintiff districts fail to meet state standards and perform far below average on state performance evaluations.

Before offering a social, political, and legal history of school finance reform in Massachusetts, a brief introduction to the state’s public education is in order. Massachusetts has a population of approximately 6.3 million people and is divided into 351 cities and towns. In the 2006–2007 school year, 968,661 students were enrolled in 389 operating public school districts. Of those students, 71.5% were white, 13.3% were Hispanic, and 8.2% were African American. In addition, 16.9% of students were enrolled in special education, and 28.9% were from low income backgrounds. At the time McDuffy was filed, the Commonwealth provided 35.47% of all funding for public education, and local cities and towns provided 60.42%. Massachusetts ranked seventh in the nation in total per-pupil expenditures, but forty-third in the proportion of education expenditures provided by the state. Reliance on local property taxes created huge disparities in per-pupil expenditures between districts. In Fiscal Year (FY) 1991, the Town of Lincoln spent $9,567 per-pupil while the Town of Douglas spent $3,251.

I. SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND LEGAL HISTORY OF SCHOOL FINANCE REFORM IN MASSACHUSETTS

A. THE EARLY YEARS

The Council for Fair School Finance (Council) was formed by the Massachusetts “education establishment” in 1975 for the purpose of fi-

---

25 Id.
26 Id.
29 Brief for the Plaintiffs at 54, McDuffy, 615 N.E.2d 516 (No. SJC 06128).
ing a state-level, school finance lawsuit.30 The founding organizations included the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers and the Massachusetts Teachers Association (the two state teachers unions), the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, and the Massachusetts Association of School Committees.31 The first suit was filed in 1978 under the caption Webby v. Dukakis.32 Almost immediately after the suit was filed, the Massachusetts legislature responded by enacting the “School Funds and State Aid for Public Schools Act,” the first statewide, comprehensive school funding formula.33 The purpose of the Act was “to promote the equalization of educational opportunities in public schools of the Commonwealth.”34 Webby was then suspended to allow the new funding scheme to take effect.35

In 1980, the Massachusetts electorate approved Proposition 2 1/2, which significantly affected the ability of municipalities to raise revenues through the local property tax.36 One of the major effects of Proposition 2 1/2 was severe funding reductions for school systems across the state.37 The Webby parties initiated discovery in 1983, and in July of 1985, a single justice of the Supreme Judicial Court for the County of Suffolk referred Webby to a special master to hear evidence and make findings and conclusions.38 Later that month, the legislature responded again by

31 Shapiro Interview, supra note 30.
32 McDuffy, 615 N.E.2d at 518.
33 See id.; see also Shapiro Interview, supra note 30.
34 Stipulation of Facts, supra note 27, at 15-16.
35 McDuffy, 615 N.E.2d at 518.
36 Stipulation of Facts, supra note 27, at 10-11; Kate Strickland, The School Finance Reform Movement, a History and Prognosis: Will Massachusetts Join the Third Wave of Reform?, 32 B.C. L. Rev. 1105, 1157 n.392 (1991) (noting that Proposition 2 1/2 sets a two and one-half percent cap on the amount by which local taxes can be raised in a given year without a special voter approval called an override).
37 MASSACHUSETTS BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATION, EVERY CHILD A WINNER! A PROPOSAL FOR A LEGISLATIVE ACTION PLAN FOR SYSTEMIC REFORM OF MASSACHUSETTS’ PUBLIC PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM (July 1991) [hereinafter EVERY CHILD A WINNER!].
38 McDuffy, 615 N.E.2d at 518. A brief explanation of Massachusetts’s single justice practice is in order. The Webby v. Dukakis suit and the McDuffy suit were both filed in the Supreme Judicial Court for the County of Suffolk, the single justice court of the Commonwealth. Id. The Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) has concurrent jurisdiction with the superior court over equitable matters. See MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 231A, § 1 (2007). Parties may file cases originally with the SJC for the county of Suffolk, and the case is then referred to a single justice of the SJC. See Supreme Judicial Court for Suffolk County, http://www.sjccountyclerk.com/singiusprpr.html (last visited Feb. 25, 2008). The single justice has discretion over whether to reserve ruling and report the case to the full SJC if the parties have stipulated to a
enacting "An Act Improving the Public Schools of the Commonwealth" (1985 Act).\(^{39}\) The single justice then suspended proceedings in *Webby* once again.\(^{40}\)

**B. McDuffly and the Education Reform Act of 1993**

1. The Litigation

Under the 1985 Act, new state money was distributed according to a needs-based formula.\(^{41}\) Equal Educational Opportunity grants were specifically designed to reduce disparities in spending between school districts.\(^{42}\) However, state aid for schools was distributed along with aid to municipalities, with no particular money earmarked exclusively for schools.\(^{43}\) The entire process became a "political black box," with the official funding formulas being overridden by the legislature each year.\(^{44}\) The plaintiffs filed a restated complaint in 1990.\(^{45}\)

a. Plaintiff’s strategy

The Council contended that the Commonwealth’s school finance system denied plaintiff children the opportunity to receive an adequate education in violation of the Education Clause and the Equal Protection

\(^{39}\) *McDuffy*, 615 N.E.2d at 518. The existence of the *Webby* suit and its referral for trial almost certainly impacted the legislature’s decision to pass the Act. Telephone Interview with Alan Jay Rom, Litigation Director, Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts, in Worcester, Mass. (Jan. 15, 2007) [hereinafter Rom Interview]; Shapiro Interview, supra note 30. Mr. Rom acted as co-counsel for the plaintiffs in both *McDuffy* and *Hancock*. Rom Interview, supra.

\(^{40}\) *McDuffy*, 615 N.E.2d at 518.

\(^{41}\) Stipulation of Facts, supra note 27, at 20.

\(^{42}\) Id. at 28.

\(^{43}\) Shapiro Interview, supra note 30.

\(^{44}\) Shapiro Interview, supra note 30; Interview with Douglas Wilkins, Partner, Anderson and Krieger, LLP, in Cambridge, Mass. (Jan. 17, 2007) [hereinafter Wilkins Interview]. Mr. Wilkins was an Assistant Attorney General and chief counsel for the defendants in *McDuffy*. Id.

\(^{45}\) *McDuffy*, 615 N.E.2d at 518.
Clause of the Massachusetts constitution. They decided to frame what came to be known as *McDuffy v. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education* as an adequacy claim, rather than an equity claim or some sort of hybrid. This was due to successful adequacy lawsuits in Kentucky, New Jersey, Texas, and Montana in 1989 and 1990, and to new research on the resources necessary for diverse student populations to learn. It also saved them from difficult political decisions about the exact meaning of “equity” in the context of school finance litigation. The Council decided to seek only a declaration that the Commonwealth had the obligation to provide public school children in Massachusetts with the opportunity to receive an adequate education and that it had violated the constitution by failing to do so. Michael Weisman, lead counsel for the plaintiffs, thought that the Supreme Judicial Court would

46 The text of the Education Clause of the Massachusetts constitution reads: “Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of this Commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the science, and all seminaries of them; especially the university at Cambridge, public schools and grammar schools in the towns; to encourage private societies and public institutions, rewards and immunities, for the promotion of agriculture, arts, sciences, commerce, trades, manufactures, and a natural history of this country; to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings; sincerity, good humour, and all social affections, and generous sentiments among the people.” Mass. Const. pt. 2, ch. 5, § 2. The equal protection provisions are found in Articles 1 and 10 of the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights. Article 1 provides: “All people are born free and equal and have certain natural, essential and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the fight of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness. Equality of under the law shall not be denied or abridged because of sex, race, color, creed or national origin.” Mass. Const. pt. 1, art. 1. Article 10 provides: “Each individual of the society has a right to be protected by it in the enjoyment of his life, liberty and property, according to standing laws.” Mass. Const. pt. 1, art. 10.

47 Rom Interview, supra note 39. See Rose v. Council for Better Educ., Inc., 790 S.W.2d 186 (Ky. 1989); Helena Elementary Sch. Dist. No. 1 v. State, 769 P.2d 684 (Mont. 1989); Abbott v. Burke, 575 A.2d 359 (N.J. 1990); Edgewood Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Kirby, 777 S.W.2d 391 (Tex. 1989). While not all of the cases raised pure adequacy claims, all were based on a state Education Clause.

48 Shapiro Interview, supra note 30. This suggests that plaintiffs’ adequacy claim was a way of getting at “vertical equity” or the idea that some students require more resources than other students in order to achieve the same educational outcomes.

49 While most scholars conclude that equity is easier to understand and define than adequacy, Alan Rom explained that during the earlier iterations of the suit, the Council debated how to define equity: Equity with whom? With wealthy districts? With a state average? If equality is mandated for all districts, would that prevent wealthy districts from hosting bake sales or other informal measures to raise money for education? Rom Interview, supra note 39.

50 Id.; Interview with Michael Weisman, Partner, Weisman & McIntyre, in Boston, Mass. (Feb. 2, 2007) [hereinafter Weisman Interview]. Mr. Weisman was lead counsel for the plaintiffs in *McDuffy* and *Hancock*. Id. However, the plaintiffs’ brief to the SJC strayed a bit from this strategy. See infra discussion in Part I.B.1.e.
be more inclined to take a modest step rather than impose a dramatic remedy during the first phase of litigation and had faith that once the court declared a constitutional duty, the legislature would enact meaningful reform.\textsuperscript{51}

The Council chose sixteen plaintiff districts that were well managed but did not have sufficient funds to provide their students with an adequate education.\textsuperscript{52} They chose four “focus” districts (Brockton, Leicester, Lowell, and Winchendon), which they thought exemplified the problems in the plaintiff districts.\textsuperscript{53} The focus districts were well managed and geographically diverse, spanning both urban and rural communities.\textsuperscript{54} The urban districts dealt with similar issues in terms of racial and ethnic makeup, and all of the districts dealt with similar issues in terms of percentage of poor, English language learning, and special education students.\textsuperscript{55} The Council also selected three “comparison” districts, or districts that spent a lot of money on their school systems and were very successful.\textsuperscript{56} These districts (Brookline, Concord-Carlisle, and Wellesley) also agreed to work with the plaintiffs in assembling facts.\textsuperscript{57}

b. Defendant’s strategy

The defendants’ strategy in \textit{McDuffy} changed when Scott Harshbarger was sworn in as Attorney General in January 1991.\textsuperscript{58} When Mr. Harshbarger was campaigning for Attorney General in the fall of 1990, he attended a candidates’ forum hosted by the Greater Boston Civil Rights Council and was asked whether, if elected, he would join the plaintiffs in the \textit{McDuffy} suit and appoint a Special Attorney General to defend the Commonwealth. Harshbarger responded that he would.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{51} Weisman Interview, \textit{supra} note 50.
\textsuperscript{52} Rom Interview, \textit{supra} note 39. The sixteen plaintiff districts in \textit{McDuffy} were Brockton, Belchertown, Berkley, Carver, Hanson, Holyoke, Lawrence, Leicester, Lowell, Lynn, Rockland, Rowley, Salisbury, Springfield, Whitman, and Winchendon.
\textsuperscript{53} Id.
\textsuperscript{54} Id.
\textsuperscript{55} Id.
\textsuperscript{56} It may seem odd that the plaintiffs chose comparison districts in a pure adequacy case. This paper categorizes \textit{McDuffy} as an adequacy case because the claim was based on the Education Clause of the Massachusetts constitution and the plaintiffs did not seek equal funding for education or equal district capacity to raise funds for education. Instead, they claimed a substantive right to an adequate education, and provided evidence of the programs offered in the comparison districts to highlight the poor quality of educational services provided in plaintiff districts. \textit{See} McDuffy v. Sec’y of Executive Office of Educ., 615 N.E.2d 516, 519–20 (Mass. 1993). However, this introduces some notion of equity into the definition of an adequate education; otherwise, the services provided in comparison districts would be irrelevant to the inquiry.
\textsuperscript{57} Rom Interview, \textit{supra} note 39.
\textsuperscript{58} Wilkins Interview, \textit{supra} note 44.
\textsuperscript{59} Rom Interview, \textit{supra} note 39. Mr. Rom drafted the question. \textit{Id.}
Once he took office, Harshbarger decided that he needed to defend the Commonwealth and would not join the plaintiffs.\textsuperscript{60} Around this time, counsel at the Attorney General's office decided that the case was not contestable on the facts and that they needed to focus their efforts solely on the law.\textsuperscript{61} Therefore, they agreed to a stipulation of facts and argued that the constitutional Education Clause, which only required the legislature to "cherish" education, was hortatory and did not impose any judicially enforceable duty on the legislature.\textsuperscript{62}

c. Executive branch

The course of the litigation as a whole was profoundly impacted by statements and reports made by the defendants Commissioner of Education and Board of Education during 1990 and 1991. When the plaintiffs filed their restated complaint in 1990, then-Commissioner of Education and named defendant, Harold Raynolds, suggested that the court could help schools by siding with the plaintiffs.\textsuperscript{63} Raynolds resigned from his position in 1991 in protest over the state's disinvestment in public education.\textsuperscript{64} Once he was no longer a defendant in the litigation, he provided an affidavit in support of the plaintiffs.\textsuperscript{65} Raynolds stated, "The purpose of public education is to provide every single child with an opportunity for success in learning. In many of the communities in Massachusetts, particularly less affluent communities such as the ones in which the plaintiffs attend school, Massachusetts is failing—and failing more than ever before—to achieve this goal."\textsuperscript{66}

The Board of Education agreed. In November, 1991, the Board released the Report of the Committee on Distressed School Systems and School Reform.\textsuperscript{67} The Report proclaimed a "state of emergency" in the Commonwealth's public schools "due to grossly inadequate financial
support”68 and admitted that “[c]ertain classrooms simply warehouse children at this time, with no effective education being provided.”69 It called for ending reliance on the local property tax and creating a “foundation budget” to ensure adequate spending in school systems throughout the state.70 The Report’s author, then Board Chairman Martin Kaplan, told the Boston Globe that the Commonwealth was on a “collision course with disaster” because it did not have “adequate education funding across the board.”71 In addition, Robert Blumenthal, counsel for the defendant Department of Education, called one of the plaintiff focus districts “a school system in crisis,” and a special committee appointed by the chairman of the state Board of Education described the same district as an example of where “the commonwealth has not provided funding sufficient to satisfy its obligations . . . for public education.”72

68 Id. at 552.
69 Id. Mr. Wilkins explained that the Attorney General’s office knew that the Board was planning to release the report but did not try to stop them. “The business of the Department of Education is to try to make sure that education is maintained at the level it should be maintained . . . I think it’s wrong to have it governed by litigation . . . So we didn’t try to shut them up . . . .” Wilkins Interview, supra note 44. Paul Reville, current Chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education and co-author of the report, explained that the Board members knew about the existence of McDuffy and were aware that the report could influence the litigation. Interview with Paul Reville, Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education, in Cambridge, Mass. (Jan. 30, 2007) [hereinafter Reville Interview]. However, they chose to proceed because they believed they had a moral obligation to expose the problems in the school financing system and felt “if that contributes to the outcome of the suit, so be it. We don’t mind.” Id. Mr. Reville is the co-founder and Executive Director of the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education. He served on the Massachusetts State Board of Education from 1991–1996 and was one of the coauthors of the Report of the Committee on Distressed School Systems and School Reform. Mr. Reville also chaired the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission from 1996–2003. He is currently the President of the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy and became Chairman of the State Board of Education on August 28, 2007. See The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, http://www.renniecenter.org/1staff.html (last visited Feb. 25, 2008). Not all Board members agreed. Piedad Robertson, Secretary of the Executive Office of Education and a member of Governor Weld’s cabinet, resigned from the Committee after consulting legal counsel because, as a named defendant in McDuffy, she did not feel she should sign a report which stated that the whole school financing system was in need of reform. See Jack Sullivan, Weld Aide Downplays School Report, BOSTON GLOBE, Nov. 25, 1991, at 13.

70 Sullivan, supra note 69. Counsel for the plaintiffs apparently thought the Board’s report was vital to their case as they began their brief to the Supreme Judicial Court by quoting from it extensively. Brief for the Plaintiffs, supra note 29, at 2. The McDuffy court agreed. After quoting the same passages, the court stated, “Arguably, this admission, by itself, suffices to establish the constitutional violations.” McDuffy, 615 N.E.2d at 552.


72 Patricia Nealon, In Brockton, a Case Study of Crisis; Students, Teachers Feel $5.5m in Cuts, BOSTON GLOBE, Nov. 24, 1991, at 38.
d. Stipulation of facts and conditions in the plaintiff districts

*McDuffy* remains the only school finance case in the country to be decided solely on a stipulated record.\(^73\) The parties submitted a Stipulation of Agreed Facts in October 1991 and a supplement with a six-volume appendix the next year.\(^74\) The stipulation stated that the focus districts were typical of all plaintiff school districts.\(^75\) All four focus districts had per-pupil expenditures\(^76\) and equalized property valuation below the state average.\(^77\) The superintendents in all four districts stated that their schools could not provide students with an adequate education due to fiscal constraints.\(^78\)

The stipulation also revealed the terrible conditions in the focus districts. In Brockton, first- and second-graders had no math textbooks, first- through third-graders had no writing textbooks, and seventh-graders had no social studies textbooks.\(^79\) In Leicester, teachers were discouraged from attending trainings because the school could not afford to pay substitutes, and the primary school teachers spent $500–$600 of their own money on classroom supplies each year.\(^80\) In Lowell, all administrators, including the superintendent, spent one day per week acting as a substitute teacher.\(^81\) In Winchendon, the middle school principal and assistant principal were eliminated as a result of funding cuts.\(^82\) In addition, the district could not afford an elementary school science program, elementary or middle school art programs or high school advanced placement or honors courses.\(^83\)

The parties also stipulated to a number of conclusions that impacted the *McDuffy* court. First, a public school in one of the comparison districts “[would] offer significantly greater educational opportunities than the public schools in the communities in which the plaintiffs attend school.”\(^84\) Second, although there was disagreement among social science experts over the impact of resources on educational quality, all agreed that schools must have sufficient funds in order to reach educa-

---

\(^73\) Rom, *supra* note 14, at 125.
\(^74\) *McDuffy*, 615 N.E.2d at 518.
\(^75\) Stipulation of Facts, *supra* note 27, at 41.
\(^76\) For the 1989–1990 school year, per-pupil expenditure in Brockton was $4,191, in Leicester $4,088, in Lowell $4,455, and in Winchendon $3,783. The statewide average was $4,972. *Id.* at 44, 128, 149, 195.
\(^77\) *Id.* at 62, 143, 161, 210.
\(^78\) *Id.* at 48–49, 53, 129, 153–54, 195.
\(^79\) *Id.* at 53–55.
\(^80\) *Id.* at 131–32.
\(^81\) *Id.* at 153.
\(^82\) *Id.* at 196, 201.
\(^83\) *Id.* at 207–08.
\(^84\) *Id.* at 42.
tional goals. And third, the amount of money available to schools in the comparison districts "[was] a significant contributing factor that affects the quality of the education that these communities are able to provide their students, as compared to the plaintiffs' communities." In December of 1992, a single justice reserved and reported the case without decision to the full Supreme Judicial Court on the stipulated record.

e. Briefs of the parties

The plaintiffs argued that the Education Clause of the Massachusetts constitution required the Commonwealth to provide every public school child with the opportunity to receive an adequate education and that this duty could not be delegated to local governments. They sought a declaratory judgment that the Massachusetts constitution guaranteed students the right to an equal opportunity to receive an adequate education. Plaintiffs asked the court to provide guidelines for a constitutional system and endorsed the seven guidelines adopted by the Kentucky Supreme Court in *Rose v. Council for Better Education.* They also asked the court to declare that each school district must have a guaranteed minimum level of funding, citing the Board of Education’s and Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education’s (MBAE) support for a foundation budget.

The defendants stated the issue identically to the plaintiffs: whether, under the Education Clause or equal protection provisions of the Massachusetts constitution, the Commonwealth had a duty to provide the plaintiffs with equal access to an adequate education. They argued that state

---

85 Id.
86 Id. at 43.
87 McDuffy v. Sec’y of Executive Office of Educ., 615 N.E.2d 516, 518 (Mass. 1993). There was no lower court decision in *McDuffy.* For an explanation of single justice practice, see supra note 38.
88 Brief for the Plaintiffs, *supra* note 29, at 85, 125–26. Plaintiffs also argued that the Commonwealth had a duty under the equal protection provisions of the Massachusetts constitution to provide children with equal access to an adequate education. *Id.* at 129–31. They contended that education was a fundamental right under the constitution and that the Commonwealth had no compelling government interest in depriving plaintiffs of an adequate education. *Id.* at 103, 129. Local control was not compelling because only districts with large tax bases could actually "control" education; property-poor districts could not tax themselves into being able to provide an adequate education. *Id.* at 140, 143. In the alternative, plaintiffs argued that the Massachusetts school finance system was not rationally related to any legitimate state interest. *Id.* at 127–53. The court decided the case solely on the Education Clause and did not reach the equal protection issue. *McDuffy,* 615 N.E.2d at 522 n.15.
90 *Id.* at 157 (quoting *Rose v. Council for Better Educ., Inc.*, 790 S.W.2d 186, 212 (Ky. 1989)).
91 *Id.* at 158–59. For an explanation of the MBAE’s role, see infra Part I.B.2.b.
aid had an equalizing effect that reduced the effects of unequal district income and property wealth to a point where per-pupil expenditures were no longer substantially unequal.93 In addition, even in the lowest spending districts, spending was high by historic measures. Massachusetts per-pupil expenditures ranked seventh or eighth highest in the nation.94

Defendants argued that the constitution left school finance decisions to the legislature and the democratic process.95 First, the Education Clause was aspirational, not mandatory, and did not create judicially enforceable rights.96 The plain language, structure, history, and original understanding of the clause all supported this interpretation.97 Next, if the Education Clause did impose some duty on the legislature, the legislature had acted to “cherish” education by providing equalizing state funding and promoting local control.98 If the constitution required the Commonwealth to provide plaintiffs with an adequate education, the plaintiffs had not shown that the duty had been violated.99 Lastly, school finance litigation in Texas and New Jersey cautioned against a constitutional interpretation that would require massive, redistributive state spending in the face of popular opposition.100

f. At the Supreme Judicial Court

The Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) heard oral argument in February 1993 and issued its decision on June 15 of that year.101 The court decided the case solely on the Education Clause, holding that it imposed “a

---

93 Brief for the Defendants, supra note 28, at 19–23. Specifically, defendants used the Gini Coefficient to show that the departure from perfect equality in per-pupil expenditure was only ten percent. Id. at 21.
94 Id. at 27–31. However, when only state funding was considered, Massachusetts ranked forty-third. Id. at 31.
95 Id. at 60.
96 Id. at 60, 65.
97 Id. at 60–87. The defendants argued that the word “cherish” meant merely to hold dear. Id. at 61–62. First, the framers and first legislatures of the Commonwealth could not have thought that “cherish” meant to support or provide for education, because no state funding was provided until 1827. Id. at 62–63. Second, the Education Clause was placed in the structural section of the constitution, rather than the section that protected individual rights. Id. at 63–64. Third, the legislature’s “duty” in the Education Clause was not only to “cherish” the public schools, “but also to ‘encourage’ private and public efforts in [the] promotion of agriculture, arts, sciences, etc.” and to “countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence.” Id. at 64. These goals could not be judicially enforceable. Id.
98 Id. at 96–100, 102–06. The legislature provided $30 million in emergency school funding during the 1991–1992 school year. Money was distributed to reduce classroom overcrowding and purchase new text books. One-hundred eighty-six million dollars in emergency funding was also budgeted for Fiscal Year (FY) 1993. Id. at 102–03.
99 Id. at 111–17. The defendants conceded that a minimal level of education could be required, but they argued that plaintiffs had not alleged that such a standard had been violated. Id. at 116 n.50.
100 Id. at 132–37.
constitutional duty on the Commonwealth to ensure the education of its children in the public schools.\(^\text{102}\)

The bulk of the court’s opinion consists of a detailed explanation of the history of public education in Massachusetts since 1647 and a rigorous analysis of the language and original understanding of the Education Clause.\(^\text{103}\) The Education Clause, in relevant part, imposes a duty on legislatures and magistrates “to cherish . . . public schools and grammar schools in the towns.”\(^\text{104}\) Chief Justice Paul Liacos, through the use of eighteenth century dictionaries, showed that when the Massachusetts constitution was adopted, “a duty to cherish” meant an obligation to support and nurture.\(^\text{105}\) After summarizing the early writings of John Adams, principal author of the Massachusetts constitution, and the views and actions of early Massachusetts legislatures, the court concluded that “the Commonwealth has a duty to provide an education for all its children, rich and poor, in every city and town of the Commonwealth at the public school level.”\(^\text{106}\) The court further explained that this duty lay squarely on the executive and legislative branches. While the Commonwealth could delegate some implementation of education policy to local governments, it could not “abdicate the obligation imposed on magistrates and Legislatures placed on them by the Constitution.”\(^\text{107}\)

After reviewing the “bleak portrait of the plaintiffs’ schools . . . painted in large part by the defendant’s own statements,” the court concluded that the Commonwealth was failing to fulfill its constitutional obligation to educate all children.\(^\text{108}\) To define the nature of the Commonwealth’s duty, the court adopted the seven guidelines set out by the Kentucky Supreme Court in *Rose v. Council for Better Education*.\(^\text{109}\)

\(^{102}\) Id. at 519.

\(^{103}\) See id. at 523–45.

\(^{104}\) Id. at 523 (quoting MASS. CONST. pt. II, ch. 5, § 2).

\(^{105}\) Id. at 525–26.

\(^{106}\) Id. at 548.

\(^{107}\) Id.

\(^{108}\) Id. at 553–54. In coming to its conclusion, the court described “statement after statement recounting the Commonwealth’s failure to educate the children in the plaintiffs’ school and those they typify,” and was particularly affected by the 1991 Report of the Committee on Distressed School Systems and School Reform. *Id.* at 552.

\(^{109}\) See id. at 554 (“An educated child must posses ‘at least the seven following capabilities: (i) sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization; (ii) sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable students to make informed choices; (iii) sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation; (iv) sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness; (v) sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage; (vi) sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academics or vocational fields so as to enable each child to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and (vii) sufficient level of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding...
The court stressed that the ultimate responsibility for defining the specific and appropriate means of providing the constitutionally required education was properly left to the legislative and executive branches. It expressed faith that the Commonwealth would fulfill its duty and remedy the constitutional violations. The court concluded by permitting a single justice to retain jurisdiction to "determine whether, within a reasonable time, appropriate legislative action has been taken."

2. The Legislation

The education reform movement in Massachusetts cannot be explained solely in terms of the McDuffy litigation. Education reform had political momentum of its own that can only be understood by examining the interrelated roles of the factual situation in the school districts between 1990 and 1993, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), and the political leadership of state senator Thomas Birmingham, state representative Mark Roosevelt, and Governor William Weld.

a. Facts on the ground

During the mid-1980s, the Massachusetts economy was strong, and state aid to public schools helped soften the blow of Proposition 2 1/2. However, in 1988, Massachusetts entered a period of economic downturn that profoundly impacted state aid to public schools. In FY 1987, 39.04% of school budgets came from state aid, but by FY 1990, that number was down to 35.47%. In FY 1990, the state attempted to cut local aid by $210 million; in FY 1992 local aid was successfully reduced by $328.6 million, or 20.6%. The impact on schools did not go unnoticed. School budgets were "cut to the bone" as a result of the cuts in state aid. Newspaper stories highlighted students in Ware, who, after

---

Footnotes:

110 See id. at 554-55.
111 See id. at 554. For a discussion of why the court had such faith in the legislature, see supra Part I.B.3.b.
112 Id. at 556. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor concurred in part and dissented in part, finding that although the Commonwealth did have an enforceable constitutional duty to provide education for all of its children, the plaintiffs had not shown that the duty had been violated. See id. at 556-57 (O'Connor, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part).
114 Id.; see also Diego Ribadeneira, School Board Hears of Devastation by Cuts, BOSTON GLOBE, Sept. 27, 1991, at 1.
115 Stipulation of Facts, supra note 27, at 37.
116 Id. at 32-33. In FY 1990 the $210 million cut was successfully challenged by a lawsuit, but the funding was not distributed to cities until FY 1991. Id.
117 Wilkins Interview, supra note 44.
their elementary school was condemned, had to eat lunch in the basement of the district court, only feet away from shackled prisoners. In Holyoke, one special education class had eighty students.

However, there was never any mass social movement around school funding. Paul Reville, current Chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education, explained that, in general, parents were fairly happy with their own children's schools, therefore pressure for education reform came more from the political and governmental elite. Senator Thomas Birmingham, who co-chaired the Senate Education Committee during this era, confirmed that education reform was mostly run by institutional players and interest groups.

b. Jack Rennie and the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education

One of the most important institutional players was the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE). The MBAE was formed in 1988 by Jack Rennie, a well respected businessman and CEO, and Paul Reville, an education advocate, for the purpose of bringing about a massive reinvention of the public school system in Massachusetts. Conceiving of the project as "reform done with the [education] field, not to the field," the MBAE immediately embarked on meetings with stakeholder groups to find out what was needed to reform and reshape public education. Out of these conversations emerged the 1991 report

---

118 See Flint, supra note 113.
119 Ribadeneira, supra note 114, at 1.
120 See Interview with Thomas Birmingham, Former Senator, Massachusetts State Legislature, in Boston, Mass. (Jan. 25, 2007 and Feb. 1, 2007) [hereinafter Birmingham Interview]. Former Senator Birmingham was the chairman of the Senate Education committee, chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, and then Senate President between 1991 and 2002. Id. He was one of the primary authors of the Education Reform Act of 1993 and left the legislature to run for Governor of Massachusetts in 2002. Id.
121 Reville Interview, supra note 69.
122 Birmingham Interview, supra note 120.
123 Reville Interview, supra note 69. Mr. Rennie was the Chairman and CEO of Pacer Systems Inc. and Mr. Reville, at that time, ran a local education fund in Worcester. Id. The two sat on the Commonwealth's School Business Partnership Advisory Group. Id. Mr. Reville explained that as business leaders, Mr. Rennie and others spent increasing time in public schools through partnership activities; they were shocked by the lack of clear goals, accountability, human resource development, and power for principles to run their own schools. Id. These business leaders came to realize that schools were not producing kids who were ready to take the kinds of jobs they had to offer. Id.
124 Id.
125 Everyone interviewed for this paper who discussed the role of the MBAE stressed how inclusive of all voices the organization, and Jack Rennie in particular, was. Interview with Joanne Blum, Governmental Services Director, Massachusetts Teachers Association, in Boston, Mass. (Jan. 26, 2007) [hereinafter Blum Interview]; Shapiro Interview, supra note 30. The list of stakeholders consulted includes state legislators, both state teachers unions, superintendents, members of the State Board of Education, local school committee members, staff
“Every Child a Winner! A Proposal for a Legislative Action Plan for Systemic Reform of Massachusetts’ Public Primary and Secondary Education System.” The basic premise of the report was high standards and accountability for all students in exchange for a progressive refinancing of public schools. The MBAE recommended that the Commonwealth create outcome-oriented goals for education and performance measurements to attach rewards and penalties to school performance. In exchange, the state would calculate a foundation budget for each school district. The budget, created by school superintendents and written by economist and MBAE consultant Dr. Edward Moscovitch, was based on specific factors and assumptions and took into account the increased costs of educating special education, bilingual, and low income students.

The report was incredibly well-received by decisionmakers on Beacon Hill and across the Commonwealth. Governor Weld, a Republican, was more comfortable dealing with business groups than he was with the education “establishment”—teachers unions, superintendents, and school committees. Jack Rennie had political connections to the Weld administration, and Paul Reville was close to James Harrington, Weld’s education advisor during his transition in early 1991. Education was at the top of the political agenda, and both Governor Weld and the state house and senate leadership wanted some type of reform. The MBAE proposals were perfectly situated to become the ideas that catalyzed the movement.

from the Department of Education, professors, the Commissioner of Education, Governor Weld and his advisors, the Boston Chamber of Commerce, the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, the Small Business Association of New England, the University of Massachusetts, and many others. See Every Child a Winner!, supra note 37, at Appendix A-5 to 9.

126 See generally Every Child a Winner!, supra note 37 (proposing how to reform the failing education system).

127 Reville Interview, supra note 69.

128 See Every Child a Winner!, supra note 37, at 27–28.

129 See id. at 36–39.

130 Id. at 36. The budget included extra teachers and aids to be provided for special education students and smaller class sizes to be provided for bilingual students. Id. at Appendix D-4 to 5. For low income students there was money to reduce class sizes and create half day preschool, full day kindergarten, and parent outreach programs for children ages one to three. Id. at Appendix D-16 to 17. Extra hours of schooling during the academic year and a twelve-week summer program were also included. Id. at 36. Appendix D-17. This extra state funding made a huge difference in the foundation budgets of districts with high percentages of low income students. Id. at Appendix D-19 to 20. In the eleven districts with low income enrollment greater than 40%, Boston was the only district that spent within $2,000 per pupil of its foundation budget. See id. at Appendix D-20.

131 Shapiro Interview, supra note 30.

132 Reville Interview, supra note 69.

133 See Flint, supra note 113.
The story of education reform in the Massachusetts state house is largely one of the heroic efforts of Representative Mark Roosevelt and Senator Thomas Birmingham. Newly appointed to chair the House-Senate Joint Education Committee, both men were sincerely committed to education reform and to public education. Governor Weld came on board early as well.

Joint meetings between Representative Roosevelt, Senator Birmingham, Governor Weld, and the MBAE began in the summer of 1991, with the idea that all three branches would work together to submit a joint education reform bill. All parties agreed on the basic concept of a massive infusion of new state money in the form of a foundation budget in exchange for high standards and accountability from all students, teachers, and schools. However, talks broke down during the summer of 1992, mostly over funding, and each branch eventually submitted its own bill. Edward Moscovitch continued to work with Representative Roosevelt, and his foundation budget made it into the final legislation almost whole cloth.

As the bills made their way through the state house, there was an absence of real, vehement, institutional opposition to education reform. Some legislators were concerned about what the foundation budget would cost. Others were skeptical that it would constitute “real” re-
form, given the problems with the 1978 and 1985 legislation. However, no organizations were opposed to the general proposition of increased state funding in exchange for high standards. Wealthy school districts did not lobby against the reform bill. There was no furor from anti-tax coalitions or other small government groups. Out of all the organizations it met with, the MBAE had the most difficult time getting the teachers unions, both of whom were members of the Council, on board. Senator Birmingham pointed out that the lack of opposition might have been due to the fact that most people, including most legislators, did not understand how redistributive the foundation budget would be. The formula was a complicated calculation determined by eighteen different factors, and very few people besides its authors knew precisely how it worked. He also acknowledged that while State House support for the legislation was very broad, “for some legislators, I think it was probably as deep as the veneer of the table.”

That is not to say that the bill “rolled in on wheels of inevitability.” It took two years and hundreds of hours of work from the time meetings with Representative Roosevelt, Senator Birmingham, and Governor Weld first began until final passage of the bill. Funding for the ERA was a huge fight that caused multiple breakdowns in negotiations. Even in the days leading up to final passage in June of 1993 there was a fair amount of politicking. However, final passage was secured on
June 8, 1993, and Governor Weld signed the Education Reform Act of 1993 (ERA) on June 18, three days after the McDuffy decision.151

The ERA dramatically changed the system of public education in the Commonwealth.152 The foundation of the Act was a massive increase in state funding for education to be distributed in a very progressive manner, in exchange for increased accountability from students, teachers, and administrators for educational outcomes.153 The Act has a number of key provisions. First, it established a foundation budget for each school district, designed to be the minimum level of per-pupil spending for each district.154 The foundation budget is calculated by eighteen factors ranging from teacher salaries to maintenance expenses.155 A minimum local contribution, based on equalized property valuation, is also required.156 The state makes up the difference between a school district’s local contribution and its foundation budget through Chapter 70 aid.157 The budget formula includes weights to account for the higher cost of educating special education students, English language learners, and low income students.158

Second, the ERA set up a sophisticated assessment and accountability system. It directed the Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education to establish statewide educational standards for all elementary and secondary school students and “curriculum frameworks” for attaining those standards in English, math, science and technology, history and social science, foreign languages, and the arts.159 It instructed the board to create a system to evaluate the performance of districts and schools based on statewide academic standards.160 Schools that fail to improve

---

151 Howe, supra note 8, at 1.
152 The Education Reform Act of 1993 is codified at 1993 Mass. Legis. Serv. Ch. 71 (West). Most of the Act’s changes are codified at MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 69, § 1-1L, ch. 70, and ch. 71 (2007).
153 Birmingham Interview, supra note 120; Reville Interview, supra note 69.
155 See id. (citing MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 70, § 2).
156 Id. (citing MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 70, § 6).
160 Id.
student academic performance can be deemed “underperforming” or “chronically underperforming” and can be taken over by the state.\textsuperscript{161} The Act also created a rigorous new teacher qualification program.\textsuperscript{162} Lastly, it removed principals from collective bargaining agreements and officially abolished teacher tenure.\textsuperscript{163}

3. The Influence of the Court on the Legislative Outcome and Vice Versa

a. The impact of \textit{McDuffy} on the Education Reform Act

While the ERA was not a response to the \textit{McDuffy} decision, as the bill was passed one week before the court issued its decision, the litigation played an important role in the development of the Act and the general politics concerning education reform. Legislators were mindful of \textit{McDuffy} as they debated education reform.\textsuperscript{164} They were particularly aware that, in order to address the plaintiff’s case, any reform would need to confront the rampant inequalities in the financing system.\textsuperscript{165} Both the MBAE and Senator Birmingham used the existence of the lawsuit to push state legislators to act.\textsuperscript{166} Lead counsel for defendants, Douglas Wilkins, met with legislators and staffers to keep them apprised of case developments.\textsuperscript{167} Senator Birmingham also met with plaintiffs’ counsel while the case was proceeding. He explained that he supported the plaintiffs’ case and hoped the SJC would declare that an equitable, adequate education was constitutionally required in Massachusetts, thinking “it would make a firmer basis going forward for support for education if it was a constitutional requirement.”\textsuperscript{168}

Facts developed by the plaintiffs for the court case helped to create the sense that the school finance system was broken and needed fixing. This almost certainly influenced how legislators thought about the issue. Newspaper articles commonly used stipulated facts to highlight the dis-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[161] Id.
  \item[162] Id. at *7.
  \item[163] Id. Thomas Payzant, the Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools from 1995 until 2006, explained that while taking school principles out of collective bargaining had a major impact on day to day school operations, officially abolishing teacher tenure did not, because the new “just cause” system was virtually indistinguishable from the old. Interview with Thomas Payzant, Senior Lecturer, Harvard Graduate School of Education, in Cambridge, Mass. (Mar. 21, 2007).
  \item[164] Birmingham Interview, supra note 120; Reville Interview, supra note 69.
  \item[165] Reville Interview, supra note 69.
  \item[166] Id.; Birmingham Interview, supra note 120.
  \item[167] Wilkins Interview, supra note 44.
  \item[168] Birmingham Interview, supra note 120. For a discussion of how \textit{McDuffy} influenced the implementation of the Education Reform Act, see infra Part I.C.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
parities between districts.\textsuperscript{169} While the Council as an entity did not lobby, individual member groups did, and when they spoke to legislators and testified at hearings, they used facts developed in the litigation to prove their points.\textsuperscript{170} The \textit{Boston Globe} consistently connected the pending education reform bills to the lawsuit; after the decision came down, the \textit{Globe} published a set of articles on whether the Act would fulfill the court’s constitutional mandate.\textsuperscript{171} When \textit{McDuffy} was referred to the full SJC by the single justice, state officials expressed hope that the case would prompt Governor Weld and the Legislature to pass a reform bill before they were forced to do so by the court. Attorney General Harshbarger advised that “the fastest and least adversarial way to achieve meaningful reform in our education system is for the governor and \textit{[l]}egislature to agree on a legislative package.”\textsuperscript{172}

b. The impact of the Education Reform Act on \textit{McDuffy}

In most school finance cases, this inquiry is irrelevant because legislation is passed in order to remedy a constitutional violation already declared by the court. However, in \textit{McDuffy}, the reform legislation was passed one week before the court issued its decision, and it is therefore useful to consider what, if any, impact the legislation had on the court’s decision. State legislators had their own theories at the time. A number commented that they were struck by the timing of \textit{McDuffy} and speculated whether the SJC was trying to push Governor Weld to sign the bill, which he did three days later, or “to ensure the court acted in time to look like it had forced the bill’s enactment without offending legislators by setting them up to pass the bill under threat.”\textsuperscript{173}

When the case was briefed, the court knew that education reform legislation was in the works. Newspaper articles about the legislation were difficult to avoid. The plaintiffs stated in their brief that both the MBAE and Governor Weld had proposed a foundation budget formula.\textsuperscript{174} Most importantly, Justice John Greaney, a member of the


\textsuperscript{170} Shapiro Interview, \textit{supra} note 30.


\textsuperscript{173} Peter J. Howe, \textit{School Bill May Answer SJC Demands; Speed of Aid Hikes Seen as an Issue}, \textit{Boston Globe}, June 16, 1993, at 19.

\textsuperscript{174} Brief for the Plaintiffs, \textit{supra} note 29, at 159. In its amicus brief to the court, the MBAE also stressed that reform legislation was imminent. \textit{See also} Brief of Amici Curiae
The McDuffy court, confirmed the justices’ knowledge of the impending legislation. In his Hancock dissent, Greaney explained that “McDuffy was released with the court’s knowledge that the Legislature was poised to enact the Education Reform Act of 1993... the three events—the McDuffy decision and the Act’s passage and signing—comprised in fact and law a joint enterprise on the part of the three branches of government.” He made a similar point during the Hancock oral argument, explaining that the lack of a specific remedy in McDuffy had to be considered in light of the court’s knowledge, at the time the decision was written, that passage of the ERA was imminent. Therefore, it seems certain that the impending passage of the ERA influenced how the court wrote the McDuffy decision and why it expressed such confidence that the legislature would step in with an appropriate remedy.

C. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT AND THE ROAD TO HANCOCK

Getting the ERA implemented was difficult. The bill was signed into law with no dedicated pool of money to fund the massive increases in state aid that were scheduled to phase in over seven years, and Governor Weld vowed to veto any tax increase that the legislature tried in order to fund the bill. That all school districts reached their foundation budgets by the year 2000 was largely the result of Senator Birmingham’s work in the state house, a burgeoning economy that made fully-funding the bill possible without increasing taxes, and McDuffy. Sen-
ator Birmingham used the *McDuffy* decision to prod legislators to fund the Act even when political will was lacking. \(^{179}\) For example, in 1995, the house budget came out of the Ways and Means Committee with $46 million cut from what had been promised for education reform. \(^{180}\) Speculation abounded that legislative support for the ERA was unraveling and the legislature would not keep its promise to schools. \(^{181}\) The *McDuffy* plaintiffs immediately filed for additional relief. \(^{182}\) However, after the senate budget fully funded the Act and the house agreed to the senate funding, the plaintiffs dropped their claim. \(^{183}\) Similar funding issues arose a number of other times. \(^{184}\)

Notwithstanding these setbacks, education funding took precedence over all other social programs between 1993 and 2000. \(^{185}\) By 2000, every school district in Massachusetts was spending at or above its foundation budget. \(^{186}\) State aid to public schools increased from $1.6 billion in 1993 to $4 billion in 2002. \(^{187}\) Between 1993 and 2003, the Commonwealth spent a total of $30.8 billion in state aid to public schools. \(^{188}\) State aid also reduced or reversed spending gaps between districts. In 1993, the top 25% of districts by property wealth spent 38% more per pupil than the lowest 25%; in 2003, the difference was reduced to 19%. \(^{189}\) In terms of numbers of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, the 25% of districts with the most students in poverty spent 4% less than the 25% of districts with the least numbers of poor students in 1993; in 2002, the numbers reversed, with the highest poverty districts spending $8,504, or 5% more than the lowest poverty districts at $8,144. \(^{190}\) In addition, the curriculum frameworks were adopted in

\(^{179}\) Birmingham Interview, *supra* note 120.

\(^{180}\) Peter J. Howe, *Planned School Aid Hike Is Cut; House Chairman Says $46m Must Go*, *Boston Globe*, Apr. 4, 1995, at 23.

\(^{181}\) Birmingham Interview, *supra* note 120; *see also* Howe, *supra* note 180.

\(^{182}\) Shapiro Interview, *supra* note 30; Weisman Interview, *supra* note 50; *see also* Jordana Hart, *Education Funding Suit Reopened*, *Boston Globe*, May 11, 1995, at 64.

\(^{183}\) *See* Birmingham Interview, *supra* note 120; Weisman Interview, *supra* note 50.

\(^{184}\) In 1999, the house budget cut $90 million from what had been promised for education reform, and the budget was held up for six months because Senator Birmingham refused to pass it without fully funding the Act. *See* Doreen Judica Vigue, *Education Reform Funds May Be Cut; Schools Losing State House Allies*, *Boston Globe*, Oct. 18, 1999, at A1. Later that year then-Governor Cellucci vetoed $94 million of school aid, and the veto was unanimously overridden by the house and senate. *See* Michael Crowley, *Lawmakers Override Veto of School Aid; $94m Fund Restored as Cellucci Suffers Setbacks in Final Hours*, *Boston Globe*, Nov. 18, 1999, at A1.

\(^{185}\) Birmingham Interview, *supra* note 120.


\(^{187}\) Id.

\(^{188}\) *See* id.

\(^{189}\) Id. at *14.

\(^{190}\) Id. at *14.
1996,191 and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test192 and school and district accountability systems were administered for the first time in 1998.193 Despite the fact that the foundation budgets were about to be fully funded and the accountability system implemented, plaintiffs filed for additional relief in December of 1999.194 This was not a surprise. Many Council groups thought from the beginning that the foundation budget would not be sufficient. Two days before the ERA was signed by Governor Weld, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) argued that the foundation budget was inadequate.195 The union introduced a proposal which would have set the annual foundation budget at an average of $6,000 per student, rather than the $5,500 included in the Act.196 Norma Shapiro explained that because the formula had not been adjusted for inflation and for various other reasons, the foundation budget was about $1,000 per student too low from the start.197 However, Council members recognized that, for political reasons, they needed to allow the foundation budget to be implemented before filing for additional relief.198

---

191 See id. at *8; Birmingham Interview, supra note 120.
192 Botsford Report, 2004 WL 877984, at *9. The test is currently given in English/language arts (ELA), math, and science/technology classes. All high school students must achieve a score of “Needs Improvement” or better on the tenth grade ELA and mathematics tests in order to receive a diploma. Id.
193 Id. at *9–13. The elaborate system provides that schools with the lowest performance ratings can be referred to the Department of Education (the Department) for review to determine whether they are “underperforming.” Id. at *11. An “underperforming” determination leads to technical assistance from the Department and eventually to corrective action. Id. at *12. On the other hand, schools that drastically improve student performance can be named “compass” schools to help disseminate best practices. Id. at *11. Due to a lack of resources, the Department actually reviews very few schools each year. Id. at *11–12. In 2001, the Department identified between 100 and 200 schools as candidates for underperforming status because of very low MCAS performance but reviewed only twelve. Id.
195 See Howe, supra note 171.
197 Shapiro Interview, supra note 30. Ms. Shapiro explained that a number of items that the MBAE had kept outside the foundation budget, including preschool and teacher training, were included by the legislature in the budget without raising the overall funding. See id. However, this appears to be incorrect. Every Child a Winner! A Proposal for a Legislative Action Plan for Systemic Reform of Massachusetts’ Public Primary and Secondary Education System specifically states that the budget of approximately $5,600 per student includes $475 million per year for preschool and $73 million per year to provide additional salary payments for some teachers. Every Child a Winner!, supra note 37, at D-18. Because the ERA did not finance preschool at all, theoretically, the foundation budget should have been lowered to reflect that missing cost. Id.
198 Rom Interview, supra note 39; Shapiro Interview, supra note 30.
D. **HANCOCK v. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

1. **Plaintiffs' and Defendants' Strategy**

In *Hancock*, plaintiffs employed a strategy similar to their winning efforts in *McDuffy*. The Council again filed suit on behalf of nineteen students from nineteen districts across the Commonwealth. They claimed that public education in the plaintiff districts had not improved significantly since 1993 and that the Commonwealth was still in violation of its constitutional duty to provide students with an education. They reasoned that because the foundation budget was created before the curriculum frameworks or the MCAS test was adopted, the Commonwealth could not predict what it would cost to provide all students with the constitutionally required education. Therefore, a costing-out study was required.

The defendants' strategy was largely determined before the plaintiffs filed for additional relief: focus on the last sentence of *McDuffy*, and argue that the legislature had taken appropriate action within a reasonable time. Deirdre Roney, chief counsel for the defendants in *Hancock*, believed that the sentence was not just a throwaway, but a deliberate standard that the court should and would apply. Therefore the proper focus of the case would be on the specific actions the state had taken over the years, and not on the quality of education in the plaintiffs' districts.

2. **Stipulation Attempt and the Road to Trial**

Attempts to reach a stipulated factual record did not go well. Unlike in *McDuffy*, where the plaintiffs' attorneys enjoyed a close relationship with Attorney General Harshbarger's office, relationships between the *Hancock* attorneys were strained. After strongly encouraging the

---


201 Weisman Interview, *supra* note 50.

202 Wilkins Interview, *supra* note 44.

203 Roney Interview, *supra* note 178.

204 Id. The argument was not that money did not matter. Instead, through conversations with staff at the Department of Education, Ms. Roney developed the idea that while money did matter (and was greatly increased by the legislature after *McDuffy*), what was needed to help failing districts meet state standards was accountability and technical assistance from the Department and not more money. See id.

205 Mr. Weisman and Mr. Rom could not say enough about how different their relationship with the Attorney General’s (“AG”) office was between *McDuffy* and *Hancock*. See Rom Interview, *supra* note 39; Weisman Interview, *supra* note 50. Alan Rom said that the AG’s office had no interest in stipulating to anything, including “whether the sun was shining or it

---
parties to reach a stipulated agreement, Justice Greaney, the single justice with jurisdiction over the case, referred the case to then-Judge Margot Botsford of the superior court.\textsuperscript{207} The reference order instructed Judge Botsford to hear the parties and their witnesses and make findings of fact and such recommendations as she considered material.\textsuperscript{208}

A number of pre-trial issues illustrate key points about the Hancock case. First, Judge Botsford and the plaintiffs agreed that a trial could not proceed with all nineteen plaintiff districts.\textsuperscript{209} Judge Botsford therefore asked both parties to select between two and six “exemplary” districts on which to focus factual evidence.\textsuperscript{210} The plaintiffs agreed, but the defendants refused; they agreed to select particular schools, but refused to select any districts.\textsuperscript{211} The plaintiffs proceeded to choose their own “focus” districts, this time Brockton, Lowell, Springfield, and Winchendon, and then asked the defendants to stipulate that the four districts were typical of all nineteen plaintiff districts.\textsuperscript{212} Defendants again refused.\textsuperscript{213} They had commissioned Dr. Moscovitch, the economist who wrote the foundation budget for the MBAE, to do a study of the plaintiff districts, and based on his findings, concluded that none of the plaintiff districts were typical.\textsuperscript{214}


\textsuperscript{208} Botsford Report, 2004 WL 877984, at *3.

\textsuperscript{209} Weisman Interview, supra note 50.

\textsuperscript{210} Id.

\textsuperscript{211} Botsford Interview, supra note 207.

\textsuperscript{212} Id.

\textsuperscript{213} Id. Plaintiffs switched Leicester for Springfield. However, Springfield public schools were extremely different in terms of performance and quality and the difference was not related to funding. \textit{Botsford Report}, 2004 WL 877984, at *32. This allowed the defendants to argue that targeted assistance from the Department of Education, not increased funding, was what Springfield’s failing schools, and all failing schools, needed in order to succeed. Brief for Appellants Commissioner of Education et al. at 115–16, Hancock v. Comm’r of Educ., 822 N.E.2d 1134 (Mass. 2005) (No. SJC-09267) [hereinafter Brief for Appellants]. Ms. Roney thought the plaintiffs’ choice of focus districts was a mistake. Roney Interview, supra note 178.

\textsuperscript{214} Roney Interview, supra note 178. Dr. Moscovitch called his analysis the “value added” approach. See \textit{Botsford Report}, 2004 WL 877984, at *124–25. He analyzed performance data for each school district and calculated an average proficiency score for students of various demographic subgroups. Id. at *124. He then calculated an expected proficiency
Second, because *McDuffy* assigned to the Commonwealth the responsibility of "defining the specifics and the appropriate means to provide the constitutionally-required education," the plaintiffs and Judge Botsford asked the defendants to define the constitutionally required minimum level of education that the Commonwealth had to provide.\(^{215}\) The defendants refused, believing that the entire inquiry was contrary to *McDuffy* and that the real question was whether appropriate action had been taken within a reasonable time.\(^{216}\) In the absence of guidance from the defendants, the plaintiffs presented evidence that the Commonwealth itself considered the curriculum frameworks to be the definition of a constitutionally required education, and argued that the frameworks should therefore be the guide by which to judge education in the plaintiff districts.\(^{217}\) Judge Botsford agreed and so ordered.\(^{218}\)

3. *Trial and Judge Botsford's Report*

From June 2003 to January 2004, Judge Botsford heard testimony from 114 witnesses and accepted more than one thousand exhibits.\(^{219}\) She released a 318-page report in April 2004.\(^{220}\) Defendants presented evidence of the steps the Commonwealth had taken to improve education throughout the state. Their witnesses testified, and Judge Botsford found, that the curriculum frameworks were world class documents of exceptional quality, the teacher certification requirements were among the most rigorous in the country, the school and district accountability system was one of the first of its kind in the United States, and the MCAS test was of high quality.\(^{221}\) However, Judge Botsford also found that the Department of Education lacked the capacity to implement the accountability system.\(^{222}\) The Department reviewed only twelve to four-score for each district in the Commonwealth based on the number of students in each demographic subgroup in the district. *Id.* A district's "value added" was any positive difference between its actual proficiency score and its expected proficiency score based on the model. *Id.* at *124. Moscovitch then compared districts' "value added" with their per-pupil spending and concluded there was generally no positive relation between spending and performance. *Id.* at *124–25.


\(^{216}\) *Roney Interview*, supra note 178.

\(^{217}\) Chairman of the Board of Education, James Peyser, and Deputy Commissioner of Education, Mark McQuillan, testified that the curriculum frameworks were intended to implement the seven capabilities outlined in *McDuffy*. Brief for Appellees at 13, *Hancock*, 822 N.E.2d 1134 (No. SJC-09267).

\(^{218}\) *Botsford Report*, 2004 WL 877984, at *16; *Botsford Interview*, supra note 207.

\(^{219}\) *Hancock*, 822 N.E.2d at 1145.

\(^{220}\) See generally *Botsford Report*, 2004 WL 877984.

\(^{221}\) *Id.* at *8–19, 113.

\(^{222}\) *Id.* at *144.

teen schools per year, even though hundreds of schools’ performances made them eligible for accountability review.\textsuperscript{223}

Plaintiffs presented evidence of the quality of education in each of the four focus districts, focusing on the implementation, or lack thereof, of the curriculum frameworks, number of certified teachers, MCAS scores, SAT scores and dropout rates, special education services, and more.\textsuperscript{224} Judge Botsford found that each district was failing to provide an educational program that conformed to the curriculum frameworks or the seven \textit{McDuffy} capabilities.\textsuperscript{225} In many ways, facts on the ground were similar to those described in 1993. In Lowell high school, some health classes had more than forty students, and the department was managed by the foreign languages chair, who had no background in health.\textsuperscript{226} One Springfield middle school taught students in coatrooms and locker rooms, had no science lab, and had twelve microscopes for 930 children.\textsuperscript{227} Approximately forty percent of Springfield ninth-graders graduated with their class in four years.\textsuperscript{228} In Winchendon, no subjects were aligned to the curriculum frameworks, there were no high school electives, and no middle school math teachers were actually certified in math.\textsuperscript{229} However, Judge Botsford found that some of these problems originated in the districts themselves. Lowell refused to spend the funds required by the state; Springfield had both fantastic and terrible elementary schools, with variation that was not related to funding and instead reflected problems of management and leadership; and teachers and administrators in Winchendon were passive and did not care to make changes in the school system.\textsuperscript{230} Defendants chose not to present evidence about the quality of education in the plaintiff districts, preferring to elicit positive information about the districts from plaintiff witnesses on cross examination.\textsuperscript{231}

Both parties presented evidence about funding, which was largely rejected by the judge. Dr. Robert Costrell, chief economist of the Commonwealth, testified that once a district spent one hundred percent of its

\textsuperscript{223} Id. at *144. The Department’s staff had been cut from one thousand to fewer than four hundred at a time when its responsibilities multiplied. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{224} Deirdre Roney thought the plaintiffs were “trying the case that they won on ten years ago [in \textit{McDuffy}] rather than getting beyond that.” \textit{Roney Interview}, supra note 178. She had thought they would have spent more time on the accountability system and how under-funded it was. \textit{Id.}


\textsuperscript{226} \textit{Id.} at *66.

\textsuperscript{227} \textit{Id.} at *27, 29.

\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Id.} at *92.

\textsuperscript{229} \textit{Id.} at *34.

\textsuperscript{230} \textit{Id.} at *26–37. There was no evidence that any Winchendon teacher had ever attended one of the free summer training institutes offered by the Department, and the district had never applied for available professional development grants. \textit{Id.} at *107.

\textsuperscript{231} \textit{Roney Interview}, supra note 178.
foundation budget, there was no evidence that increased spending would improve performance.232 Instead, student performance was largely determined by district median income.233 Dr. Moscovitch presented his "value added" study, which showed that there was no positive correlation between spending and performance.234 Judge Botsford rejected both studies and also found that the "successful schools" and "professional judgment" funding models presented by the plaintiffs' experts were seriously flawed.235 However, she nonetheless held that the foundation budget did not provide sufficient funds to finance the constitutionally required education, explaining that while plaintiff districts generally spent one hundred percent of their foundation budgets, among the top performing seventy-five districts in the Commonwealth, actual spending was about 130% of foundation.236 Additionally, witnesses for both parties testified that the foundation budget did not accurately reflect the cost of an adequate education in certain areas.237 Judge Botsford found that the foundation budget under-funded special education, implementation of the curriculum frameworks, teacher salaries, bilingual education, the low income factor, growing student enrollment, and more.238

The plaintiffs also presented voluminous testimony on remedies. They focused on preschool because they believed that early childhood education was critical in order to ensure the future success of children in school,239 and witnesses for both parties unanimously agreed that high quality preschool for three and four year olds could significantly improve a child's performance in school, particularly for students at risk of school

233 Id.
234 Id. at *124–25.
235 Id. at *119–25. Dr. Costrell pointed out that under the plaintiffs' "successful schools" model, two thirds of the "successful" districts were not spending what the model deemed "necessary" to fund an adequate education, and under the "professional judgment" model, only five districts in the entire Commonwealth were spending enough. Id. at *121 n.152. Mr. Weisman knew about Dr. Costrell's critiques but decided to present the costing out studies anyway because he thought the strengths of the testimony outweighed the weaknesses. Weisman Interview, supra note 50.
236 Botsford Report, 2004 WL 877984, at *122–23. If these districts thought their foundation budgets were sufficient to provide an adequate education, theoretically they would not have consistently spent more.
237 Edward Moscovitch and then-Commissioner Driscoll both testified that the foundation budget was inadequate when it came to special education. Id. at *126. The Associate Commissioner of Education for School Finance testified that the foundation budget underestimated how much districts spent on teacher salaries. Id. at *127. Dr. Moscovitch advocated adding money to the formula for building local leadership capacity and creating a formal preschool education program. Id. at *128. He also thought the low income factor should be increased. Id.
238 Id. at *126–28.
239 Weisman Interview, supra note 50.
failure due to poverty, learning disabilities, or limited English proficiency.240

Judge Botsford concluded that while the Commonwealth had made significant progress throughout the state, the plaintiff districts were not implementing the curriculum frameworks or providing the constitutionally required education under *McDuffy*.241 She recommended that the defendants be ordered to ascertain and implement the actual cost of providing the level of education constitutionally required by *McDuffy*.242 Items that “must” have been included in the cost study were special education, implementation of the curriculum frameworks, facilities, and a public preschool program for three and four year old children at risk.243

In retrospect, Judge Botsford explained that she believed the last sentence of *McDuffy* retained jurisdiction but did not eliminate or in any way lessen the Commonwealth’s duty to provide students with the constitutionally required education.244 Therefore, she thought that the state’s efforts were to be judged not by whether the curriculum frameworks were world class documents or the MCAS test was well respected, but by how that translated into the education that children in the plaintiff districts were receiving.245 She also confessed that she regretted including the remedial section in her report and thought that the SJC might have decided *Hancock* differently if she had found only that the Commonwealth was violating its constitutional duty and left the remedy to the legislature.246

4. Briefs of the Parties

In May 2004, Justice Greaney reserved and reported the case to the full SJC to determine “whether, within a reasonable time, appropriate legislative action has been taken to provide public school students with the education required under the Massachusetts Constitution.”247

---

240 Botsford Report, 2004 WL 877984, at *137. Witnesses for the plaintiffs testified that the quality of community-based preschool programs was not as high or as consistent as public preschool programs. *Id.* at *140. The plaintiffs also presented evidence on the benefits of small class sizes (fewer than twenty students) in grades K-3 and the importance of additional services beyond the regular school day for children at risk. *Id.* at *141–42.

241 *Id.* at *143.

242 *Id.* at *145.

243 *Id.* at *146. Items that “should” have been considered for inclusion were teacher salaries, the low income factor, and the bilingual factor; other proposed factors for technology, teacher coaches, and school leadership; class sizes of fewer than twenty for grades Kindergarten through 3; school libraries; and remedial programs such as tutoring, extended day, and extended year. *Id.* at *147.

244 Botsford Interview, *supra* note 207.

245 *Id.*

246 *Id.*

247 *Hancock v. Comm'r of Educ.*, 822 N.E.2d 1134, 1146 (Mass. 2005). This framing of the issue illustrates how the “appropriate action/reasonable time” inquiry can be equivalent to
The parties’ briefs reflected their views of the issue and were therefore extremely different. Whereas in *McDuffy* the parties had stated the issue identically, the *Hancock* parties stated the issue alternatively as: 1) whether appropriate action within a reasonable time had been taken and the remedy ordered by the superior court violated separation of powers,248 and 2) whether the Commonwealth was providing plaintiff children with the minimum level of education required by the constitution and the relief ordered by the superior court was proper.249

Defendant-appellants did not contend that any of Judge Botsford’s findings were clearly erroneous, believing that the case would be won or lost on the standard the court employed.250 However, they portrayed Judge Botsford as having found that the Commonwealth violated its constitutional duty because the focus districts did not have educational outcomes equal to the comparison districts.251 They argued that because funding disparities between poor and wealthy districts had narrowed, closed, or even reversed, funding had to be adequate, because wealthy districts could not be expected to under-fund themselves.252 In addition, they claimed that actual spending would obviously be higher than foundation budget in wealthy districts because foundation budgets in wealthy districts were lower to begin with.253 They characterized the plaintiffs as arguing that “across-the-board, unrestricted spending increases [were] a

---

248 See Brief for Appellants, *supra* note 213, at 1–2.
249 See Brief for Appellees, *supra* note 217, at 1.
250 Roney Interview, *supra* note 178.
251 Brief for Appellants, *supra* note 213, at 15. Judge Botsford focused on whether the plaintiff schools were implementing the curriculum frameworks and the *McDuffy* capabilities. She did not mandate “equal” results, unless all students receiving an adequate education could be construed as “equal.” See Hancock ex rel. Hancock v. Driscoll (*Botsford Report*), No. 02-2978, 2004 WL 877984, at *16–37 (Mass. Super. Apr. 26, 2004).
252 Brief for Appellants, *supra* note 213, at 29. This contention implicitly denies a major assumption of the foundation budget—that poor schools need more money than wealthy schools in order to provide their students with an adequate education.
253 Id. at 113; Reply Brief for Appellants at 14, Hancock v. Comm’r of Educ., 822 N.E.2d 1134 (Mass. 2005) (No. SJC-09267). This reflected the fact that wealthier districts had less needy student populations and, according to the ERA, required less money to provide those students with an adequate education than poor districts. The fact that wealthier districts spent above their foundation budgets still showed that they believed that the foundation funding level was not sufficient to provide their students with the kind of education they wanted to provide. See Brief for Appellees, *supra* note 217, at 117–18.
better way to improve student performance in struggling schools and districts than accountability and targeted assistance." As such, they stressed, it was the province of the legislature, not the court, to decide how to help failing schools. Therefore, their argument concluded, the appropriate inquiry in *Hancock* was not the level of education provided in the focus districts, but whether the Commonwealth had taken appropriate action within a reasonable time. This standard properly placed responsibility for education policy in the elected branches. In contrast, Judge Botsford’s attempt to mandate particular education policy choices, especially with regard to preschool, violated the separation of powers.

Plaintiff-appellees spent the first eighty pages of their brief largely repeating Judge Botsford’s findings and conclusions. Eventually, they contended that the Commonwealth was attempting to shift the inquiry from whether the constitutional mandate was being met to whether appropriate action had been taken within a reasonable time, a task it defined as improvement, not compliance. According to plaintiffs, the constitution required more from the Commonwealth than doing its best. *McDuffy* did not hold that “improvement, however marginal and regardless of how many thousands of children [were] leaving school un-equipped with the seven capabilities and ill equipped to succeed in life, [was] constitutionally sufficient.” In fact, whether appropriate action within a reasonable time had been taken had to be judged with regard to whether all students in the plaintiff districts were receiving the constitutionally required minimum level of education. Creating academic standards, a student assessment system, and teacher certifications that were national models was not constitutionally sufficient if such programs were not being implemented in the plaintiff districts. In addition, addressing school failure through accountability and targeted assistance from the Department of Education was ineffective because Judge Bot-

---

254 Brief for Appellants, *supra* note 213, at 114.
255 *Id.* at 126–28.
256 *Id.* at 119–20.
257 *Id.* at 123–28.
258 *See* Brief for Appellees, *supra* note 217, at 6–81.
259 *Id.* at 96–99.
260 *Id.* at 5–6. The court disagreed. *See* Hancock v. Comm’r of Educ., 822 N.E.2d 1134, 1152–53 (Mass. 2005). Mr. Weisman explained that he thought appropriate action within a reasonable time was “the most absurd argument I’d ever heard” because it would mean holding adults to a lower standard than children. Weisman Interview, *supra* note 50. Children who wanted to graduate high school had to pass the MCAS; effort was not sufficient. *Id.* According to Weisman, holding that effort was sufficient for the state would be ridiculous.
262 *Id.* at 99. This point was not stressed and was first mentioned on page 97.
263 *Id.* at 102.
sford found that the Department was "not currently adequate to do the job."264

Lastly, the plaintiffs addressed the defendants’ separation of powers arguments. They tried to characterize additional school funding and public preschool as constitutional mandates, not policy choices.265 They also analogized to the Abbott v. Burke litigation in New Jersey, claiming that both state supreme courts faced a “failure to educate that has persisted for decades,”266 and therefore needed to implement a remedy to correct longstanding constitutional violations.267

5. Oral Argument and the Hancock Decision

Oral argument went terribly for the plaintiffs. The justices’ questions are discussed further below, but it is sufficient to note that plaintiffs’ attorney Alan Rom said he knew the plaintiffs would lose after attending oral argument.268

The SJC decision reaffirmed McDuffy’s constitutional mandate and praised Judge Botsford’s report, but found that the Commonwealth was meeting “its constitutional charge to ‘cherish the interests of . . . public schools.’”269 Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall, for a plurality consisting of herself, Justice Francis X. Spina, and Justice Robert J. Cordy, stated that the appropriate inquiry was, “whether, within a reasonable time, appropriate legislative action has been taken to provide public school students with the education required under the Massachusetts Constitution.”270 She openly acknowledged that serious inadequacies in public education remained, the goals of education reform had not yet been achieved, and the plaintiffs were not being well served by their schools.271 However, Marshall stressed that the public school system was radically different from the one reviewed in McDuffy. “A system mired in failure has given way to one that, although far from perfect, shows a trajectory of progress.”272 The elected branches were continuing to make education reform a priority and had undertaken a long-term, systematic, quantifiable and comprehensive process of reform to provide a high quality education to each child in the Commonwealth.273 Where,
as in this case, "the independent branches of government have shown that they share the court's concern, and that they are embracing and acting on their constitutional duty to educate all public school students," the court could not conclude that judicial intervention was required.\textsuperscript{274}

Justice Judith A. Cowin and Justice Martha B. Sosman concurred.\textsuperscript{275} They argued that the Education Clause did not impose any judicially enforceable duty on the Commonwealth and that, "instead, the clause should be construed as a broad directive, intended to establish the central importance of education in the Commonwealth and clarify that the legislative and executive branches will be responsible for the creation and maintenance of our public school system."\textsuperscript{276}

Justice Greaney—the only Hancock justice who had decided McDuffy—and Justice Roderick L. Ireland both dissented.\textsuperscript{277} Justice Greaney argued that statewide academic and teacher certification standards and student assessment systems could not satisfy the Commonwealth's constitutional duty if they were not being implemented in plaintiff districts.\textsuperscript{278} The changes enacted by the legislature "must be judged on results and not on effort (no matter how praiseworthy)."\textsuperscript{279} Justice Greaney contended that Justice Marshall effectively overruled McDuffy by finding that the Commonwealth had fulfilled its constitutional duty through effort, not through results.\textsuperscript{280} Justice Ireland argued similarly.\textsuperscript{281}

II. INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS, POLITICS, AND LEGISLATIVE GOOD FAITH

The Hancock court held that the Commonwealth was not violating its constitutional duty to cherish the public schools.\textsuperscript{282} This reinterprets McDuffy into an effort-based, rather than an outcome-based standard.

\textsuperscript{274} Id. at 1155.
\textsuperscript{275} Id. at 1159 (Cowin, J., concurring).
\textsuperscript{276} Id. at 1159 (Cowin, J., concurring). The concurring opinion is a bit unclear. At times the justices seem to say that McDuffy should be overruled and the Education Clause should be interpreted to impose no constitutional duty on the Commonwealth at all; at other times they seem to say that the Education Clause should impose a constitutional duty to provide for public schools, albeit a duty that is not judicially enforceable, arguing that the main problem with the McDuffy decision was the Rose factors. See id. at 1159-65 (Cowin, J., concurring).
\textsuperscript{277} Justice Greaney and Justice Ireland each wrote separate dissenting opinions, but joined in each other's opinions. See id. at 1165 (Greaney, J., dissenting); id. at 1173 (Ireland, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{278} Id. at 166-69 (Greaney, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{279} Id. at 1169 (Greaney, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{280} Id. at 1171 (Greaney, J., dissenting).
\textsuperscript{281} He accused Justice Marshall of implicitly overruling McDuffy by finding that the state's "painfully slow" progress satisfied the Commonwealth's constitutional duty. Id. at 1175 (Ireland, J., dissenting) (quoting id. at 1154).
\textsuperscript{282} Id. at 1136-37, 1140.
**McDuffy** held that a constitutional education requires providing students with the seven *Rose* capabilities.\(^{283}\) However, the *Hancock* court did not consider whether children in the plaintiff districts were being provided with the seven capabilities.\(^{284}\) Instead, it found that the Commonwealth was not neglecting its constitutional duty and therefore judicial intervention was not required.\(^{285}\)

Three factors help explain what led the court to reach this conclusion in *Hancock*. First, the court was aware of its own institutional constraints and concerns regarding its judicial role uniquely relevant to *Hancock* and the implementation of a remedy that would require increased funding for education. It intentionally chose not to impose a remedial order because it feared provoking inter-branch conflict. Second, the court’s fears reflected its implicit and largely correct assumption that there was a lack of political will among policy elites, the legislature, the executive branch, and the public at large for investing substantial new money in underperforming districts. Third, the court believed that the legislative and executive branches acted in good faith to fulfill their constitutional duties under *McDuffy* and had been met with a fair amount of success statewide. The court felt that given the political branches’ serious and intensive efforts to fulfill the constitutional mandate, judicial interference, even in the form of a finding of constitutional violation, would be inappropriate.

A. **THE SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT’S FEAR OF ITS OWN INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS**

Concerns about inter-branch conflict and the judiciary’s role played a part in *Hancock*.\(^{286}\) In the days following the decision, Beacon Hill legislators and others openly speculated that the desire to avoid another standoff with the legislature motivated the court’s ruling.\(^{287}\) The editor-in-chief of *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly* acknowledged that while no one could "put their finger on it and say for sure there is some political


\(^{284}\) Many have doubted from the start that the SJC would ever try to enforce the seven capabilities, believing them to be more of an aspiration than a concrete constitutional requirement. See Birmingham Interview, *supra* note 120; Wilkins Interview, *supra* note 44. This highlights the distinction between courts declaring constitutional violations and implementing remedies. While the seven capabilities were adopted in order to define the Commonwealth’s constitutional obligation, one could argue that the capabilities themselves constitute, or at least require, a particular remedy.

\(^{285}\) *Hancock*, 822 N.E.2d at 1140.

\(^{286}\) These concerns were largely irrelevant in *McDuffy* because the court knew that the legislature had passed or was about to pass comprehensive legislation. Therefore, the decision could not have caused inter-branch conflict.

wrangling going on here,” many people thought “that there might be exactly something like that going on—that somewhere in the analysis of this decision, some of the SJC justices thought it might not be the wisest thing to start another . . . standoff with the Legislature.”

The Hancock justices previously clashed with the legislature over taxes, elections, and, most famously, same-sex marriage. In 1998, Massachusetts voters passed a clean elections law to provide for public funding of political campaigns, and although it was never repealed, the legislature refused to fund it. In February, 2002, the SJC held that the constitution required the legislature to finance clean elections. The legislature refused. In April, 2002, Justice Sosman ruled that the SJC would auction off state property if the legislature continued to refuse to fund the act. In response to the “darkest moment yet in the relationship between the Legislature and the judiciary,” a top lieutenant of the state house speaker introduced a budget rider to strip the justices of the power to hire their own personnel, including secretaries and law clerks. A year and a half later, in Goodridge v. Department of Public Health, the SJC held that the refusal to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples lacked a rational basis and violated the state constitution. The senate then asked the court to clarify whether a proposed civil union bill, which would have prohibited same-sex marriage but permitted civil unions with all the benefits, rights, and responsibilities of marriage, would violate the constitution. The court said that it would. It is impossible to overstate the intense public and legislative scrutiny that Goodridge provoked. One representative filed a bill to have the four justices in the majority removed, a measure that had been attempted only twice in the Commonwealth’s history, most recently in 1922. Five people interviewed for this Article suggested that Goodridge and the

288 Id.

289 All of the justices who decided Hancock were appointed to the SJC by 2001. See Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court, http://www.massreports.com/justices/AllJustices.htm (last visited Mar. 28, 2008).


291 Id. at 11.

292 House Member Blasts Legislative Leaders, BOSTON GLOBE, Mar. 7, 2002, at B3.

293 Rick Klein, SJC Ready to Sell State Property to Pay for Clean Elections, BOSTON GLOBE, Apr. 6, 2002, at B3.


296 In re Opinions of the Justices to the Senate, 802 N.E.2d 565, 566 (Mass. 2004).

297 Id. at 572.

298 Raphael Lewis, Foes of Gay Marriage Try Long Shot: Bill Seeks to Remove Four of SJC Justices, BOSTON GLOBE, Apr. 20, 2004, at B1. Months later the SJC struck down a capital gains tax increase that had been made effective May 1, 2002. See generally Peterson v. Comm’r of Revenue, 806 N.E.2d 78 (Mass. 2004). The court held that the increase violated a constitutional requirement that all property be taxed at the same rate during the same calendar
clean elections case may have impacted the court’s decision in Hancock; only one person doubted that the cases played a role.

More importantly, during oral argument, the justices themselves indicated that they were concerned about their judicial role and their ability to implement any decision that would require increased funding for education. Justice Greaney, who dissented in Hancock because he supported a finding of liability for the Commonwealth, asked Ms. Roney what would happen if the court ordered the legislature to fund universal preschool, and the legislature responded that it did not have the money. “What are we supposed to do? There’s nothing we can do, right?” Later, he suggested that before courts “bite off big constitutional issues,” they have to think about how they are going to enforce their orders. Greaney explained that Goodridge was different because it was easily enforceable; the court could just order the issuance of marriage licenses. However, any costing-out study in Hancock would end with someone asking the court to order the legislature to appropriate more money, and courts in other states that had gone down this route had ended up in “quagmires.” Justice Sosman, who concurred in Hancock, agreed that a remedial order would get the court into “very treacherous waters.” Chief Justice Marshall asked what would happen if “you identify the measures that are necessary and then the Commonwealth comes back and says ‘there’s absolutely no way. We’ve gone to the legislature and the legislature hasn’t funded those.’”

Justice Cowin, who also concurred, thought the entire area was one for the legislature, not the court. She asked, “Why is it up to the court to mandate mandatory preschool? . . . Isn’t that something for the legisla-

---

299 Birmingham Interview, supra note 120; Blum Interview, supra note 125; Reville Interview, supra note 69; Rom Interview, supra note 39; Interview with Jarrett Barrios, Former Senator, Massachusetts State Senate, in Boston, Mass. (Feb. 14, 2007) [hereinafter Barrios Interview]. Barrios served as a state senator from 2002–2007 and resigned in May of 2007 to become president of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. See Michael Levenson, Barrios Set to Resign from State Senate—Says He Will Head Health Foundation, BOSTON GLOBE, May 23, 2007, at B1.

300 Botsford Interview, supra note 207.

301 See supra note 18.

302 Audio tape of Hancock Oral Argument, supra note 19.

303 Id.

304 Id.

305 Id.

306 Id.

307 Id.

308 Id.
She then told Mr. Weisman that he was asking them to "step into education and policy. Won’t there always be someone to say that education isn’t sufficient?" These comments and questions make it clear that at least some of the justices were concerned about the judiciary’s role, the court’s institutional constraints, and how the court would implement any remedy that required the Commonwealth to take further action to provide the plaintiffs with an adequate education.

B. Lack of Political Interest in Investing New Money in Underperforming Districts

As discussed above, implicit in the justices’ concerns about institutional competence, implementation of a judicial remedy, and inter-branch conflict was the assumption that education reform and the plaintiffs’ case no longer enjoyed the type of broad based support they did during McDuffy. Stated otherwise, the court’s concerns over how it would implement a judicial remedy would have been irrelevant if there had been substantial political support for the remedies the plaintiffs sought. This can be understood most clearly from McDuffy, where the legislature passed the Education Reform Act of 1993 before the court decision was handed down. The political situation shielded the McDuffy court from any fear of provoking the legislature with a major constitutional ruling. This section explores the politics of education reform during the time of Hancock and concludes that the court was correct in believing that a majority of policy elites, members of the public, and the legislative and executive branches did not support increased funding for plaintiff districts as a main component of education reform.

1. Policy Elites Involved in McDuffy or the Education Reform Act

A number of people and organizations that were instrumental in securing the ERA’s passage and supported the plaintiffs in McDuffy felt differently about education reform and the Hancock suit ten years later. While a number of them supported a finding of liability for the Commonwealth, none thought that increased funding for plaintiff districts should be a main component of a new round of education reform.

Dr. Edward Moscovitch, the author of the foundation budget for the MBAE, testified for the defendants in Hancock that, in high poverty districts, there was "no positive relation between spending and perform-

309 Id.
310 Id.
311 See supra Part I.B.
The day before oral argument, Dr. Moscovitch told the Boston Globe that "[t]he single biggest thing holding us back is not money." Instead, "principals and teachers don’t . . . know how to turn schools around, and the (Education) Department has not been in a position to implement a program to help them to do it."

Paul Reville, co-founder of the MBAE and supporter of the plaintiffs in McDuffy, testified for the defendants in Hancock. He felt ambivalent about the suit but was concerned that more money, by itself, would not help struggling districts. His main focus during the Hancock era was on increased school time for at-risk students and capacity building to teach teachers how to bring all students to proficiency, not on an increase in the foundation budget.

The MBAE also did not see increasing the foundation budget as a major priority for education reform. In 2002, it published a report that called intervention in districts that could not teach their students the "next big issue faced by education reform." It called for a strategy of bringing outside change agents into underperforming districts:

MABE believes that we must recognize that inherent structural flaws and ineffective local management can prevent the changes in curriculum, personnel and leadership that would lead to genuine improvements. We must be willing to challenge the status quo by shifting power away from those individuals and institutions that have not used it effectively.

---

312 Hancock ex rel. Hancock v. Driscoll (Botsford Report), No. 02-2978, 2004 WL 877984, at *124–25 (Mass. Super. Apr. 26, 2004). For a discussion of Dr. Moscovitch's testimony regarding costs that should be added to the foundation budget, see supra note 237.


314 Id. Similarly, Dr. Moscovitch published an article in 2004 praising Judge Botsford's report but arguing that schools improve through data-driven instruction, something that more money would not necessarily ensure. Edward Moscovitch, Passing Judgment: What it Will Take to Make Schools Constitutionally Adequate, COMMONWEALTH, Summer 2004, at 9, 11–12.

315 Reville Interview, supra note 69.

316 Id. Mr. Reville thought that the Commonwealth had made a substantial effort, and he feared that if the adequacy arguments were pushed too strongly it could allow teachers and schools to escape accountability. Id.


319 Id. at 2.
This strategy was directly at odds with the interests of the education establishment, who were represented on the Council and allied with the Hancock plaintiffs. The MBAE filed an amicus brief in Hancock contending that students in the plaintiff districts were not receiving a constitutional education under McDuffy. However, they did not support Judge Botsford’s conclusion that a lack of funding constituted an important and independent cause of the failure in plaintiff districts. Therefore, they argued, it was “premature to require substantial new expenditures of public funds before the schools and districts that will receive new resources have the capacity to use those resources effectively.”

Lastly, Senator Tom Birmingham and Representative Mark Roosevelt, champions of the ERA in the legislature, did not support plaintiffs’ case. Before the plaintiffs filed Hancock, they met numerous times with Senator Birmingham’s staff, who indicated that the senator thought any attempt to return to court would be premature while the legislature was fully funding the foundation budget. Representative Roosevelt had already left the legislature and was the executive director of the MBAE while Hancock was pending. In an article in Commonwealth Magazine, he contended that without management reforms, including administrative power to remove poorly performing teachers, “additional resources sent directly to local districts might be inefficient or simply wasteful.”

2. The Executive Branch

While the former Commissioner of Education and the Board of Education arguably wanted to lose in McDuffy, this was certainly not true for the executive branch in Hancock. Then-Commissioner David

---

321 Id. at 7.
322 Birmingham Interview, supra note 120.
324 Id. at 89. A week after Hancock was decided, Roosevelt published an Op-Ed in the Boston Globe arguing that once a certain level of spending had been reached, school reform was about more than money. See Mark Roosevelt, Op-Ed, Unfinished Business: Real Reform, BOSTON GLOBE, Feb. 20, 2005, at D1. He claimed that the education reform battle was between "those who are willing to take on powerful institutional interests and contemplate systemic change and those who are not" and characterized Hancock as a suit by the unions to divert attention from real reform. Id.
325 However, there were still Department employees who made statements that were helpful to the plaintiffs in Hancock. During his deposition, Deputy Education Commissioner Mark McQuillan agreed that some districts did not have sufficient resources to fully implement the curriculum frameworks. See Anand Vaishnav, New Lawsuit Attacks Public School Funding, BOSTON GLOBE, June 13, 2003, at B7; Weisman Interview, supra note 50. The AG’s office submitted 110 corrections to his 120 minute deposition, and the plaintiffs called McQuillan as their first witness at the Hancock trial. Weisman Interview, supra note 50.
Driscoll testified that the foundation formula yielded adequate funding for Commonwealth schools.326 Indeed, Deidre Roney noted that he was "solidly behind" the defense, and Judge Botsford called him a "shill for the administration."327 Additionally, then-Governor Mitt Romney made it abundantly clear that he did not think more money was the answer for improving failing schools.328 His administration’s chief economist, Dr. Robert M. Costrell, was the defense’s star witness on funding and spent countless hours working on the case and speaking to the media about how increased spending would not lead to increased school or student performance.329

3. The Legislature

Senator Jarrett Barrios and sixty other state legislators submitted an amicus brief in support of the plaintiffs in Hancock.330 The purpose of the brief was to “show the SJC there was broad support for [the plaintiff’s case and requested relief] so [the justices] didn’t feel like they were ‘meddling’ in what [was] the legislature’s duty.”331 The message, however, did not get through. Ultimately, the court was seemingly correct in its implicit assessment of the legislature’s lack of political interest in greatly increasing funding in the plaintiff districts or embarking on a second round of comprehensive education reform.

By 2002, both Representative Roosevelt and Senator Birmingham had left the state legislature; no major champions of the ERA or school funding arose to take their place.332 Senator Barrios implied that there was a sense of “been there, done that” when it came to education reform.333 Education in grades Kindergarten through twelve had taken priority over all other sectors in the 1990s, and by the time the Act was fully


327 Botsford Interview, supra note 207; Roney Interview, supra note 178.


329 Deirdre Roney sometimes got emails from Dr. Costrell at 3:00 a.m. with new ideas for the case. Roney Interview, supra note 178. For an example of Dr. Costrell’s work, see Robert M. Costrell, Wrong Answer on School Finances, COMMONWEALTH, Fall 2004, at 79.


331 Barrios Interview, supra note 299.


333 Barrios Interview, supra note 299.
funded in 2000, many legislators thought it was time to concentrate on other things. Further, the foundation budget formula was not popular in the state house. Many legislators, especially those representing fast-growing suburban communities, thought the formula was short-changing his or her district. Additional pressure was placed on the legislature in 2000 when a coalition of suburban districts began a vigorous lobbying effort to get more state money for their schools. Senator Barrios explained that the "magic of changing the formula [became] everybody has to do better, or else you're not going to get the votes." Thus, a successful legislative attempt to increase the foundation budgets for failing schools would have meant a concomitant increase for wealthy schools.

No Council groups ever seriously pushed a bill as comprehensive as Judge Botsford’s remedy before filing for additional relief. The MTA and other Council groups lobbied for foundation budget increases for plaintiff districts while Hancock was pending, but they never coalesced a movement centered on increasing state funding for underperforming schools. The MBAE was no longer active in lobbying at this point. Many legislators dropped bills for their favorite projects, but there was no comprehensive vision for where the state should be headed on education reform.

---

334 Birmingham Interview, supra note 120; Blum Interview, supra note 125; Reville Interview, supra note 69.
335 Barrios Interview, supra note 299.
336 Brian C. Mooney, School Funding Under Scrutiny; Growing Suburbs Call Formula Unfair, BOSTON GLOBE, Dec. 10, 2000, at B1. See Birmingham Interview, supra note 120; Blum Interview, supra note 125. The effort eventually paid off. In July, 2006, the legislature enacted a bill guaranteeing that within four years, each district would receive at least 17.5% of its foundation budget from state aid. See James Vaznis, Suburbs Big Aid Winners; City Districts Get Smaller Increases, BOSTON GLOBE, July 16, 2006, at 1. Under the original formula, some wealthy districts received less than 10% of their foundation budgets from the state. See id.; Shapiro Interview, supra note 30.
337 Barrios Interview, supra note 299.
338 Id.
339 Senator Birmingham said the MTA’s top priorities at the time were getting rid of charter schools and securing early retirement for teachers. Birmingham Interview, supra note 120. Senator Barrios confirmed that there was no major lobbying effort aimed at increasing the foundation budget until 2004. Barrios Interview, supra note 299.
340 For example, in 2003, the MTA introduced “A Bill to Ensure Adequate Resources to Help All Students Achieve.” See Massachusetts Teachers Association, MTA’s Bill to Ensure Adequate Resources to Help All Students Achieve, JUST THE FACTS, Jan. 20, 2003 (on file with author). By raising the sales tax one percent, the bill would have increased the foundation budget to provide for no more than fifteen students per class in kindergarten through third grade, full day kindergarten, $1,000 in remediation funding for each student who failed MCAS, preschool for three and four year olds, a minimum teacher salary of $42,000, increased special education and low income factors, and additional money for building assistance. Id.
341 Jack Rennie’s death in early 2001 left a leadership gap not only in the MBAE, but in the greater world of Massachusetts education reform. See Editorial, Rennie’s Achievement, BOSTON GLOBE, Jan. 18, 2001, at A18.
342 Blum Interview, supra note 125; Reville Interview, supra note 69.
Even as Hancock progressed, it remained a lawsuit that many people did not follow; it never created enough momentum to initiate a second round of education reform as McDuffy did for the ERA. After Judge Botsford released her report and the SJC heard oral argument, Senator Barrios introduced a bill to create a panel that would have calculated the cost of providing an adequate education in all underperforming districts. The legislation was supported by the MTA, the ACLU, and other Council groups. Despite more than half of the members of both houses of the legislature signing on to the bill, it never went anywhere before Hancock was decided because the house and senate leadership did not support it.

4. Public Opinion and The Boston Globe

Most people were likely not paying much attention to Hancock or lobbying efforts in the legislature, and there was not widespread public support for a massive increase in funding to underperforming schools. Weeks before the Hancock decision, a poll by Mass Insight Education found that only 21% of Massachusetts adults surveyed thought that schools needed more money. MTA polls also revealed that most people believed that education had improved. On the contrary, in December, 1992, 50 to 66% of voters supported raising the sales tax as long as it was linked to education. The Boston Globe, which had been solidly behind the plaintiffs in McDuffy, later published several articles questioning whether more money mattered. For example, an editorial in September 2004 argued that “money isn’t the biggest factor in the next round of education reform at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.” The Globe later called Hancock “an educated ruling,” which recognized that “it will take more than adjustments to the state education funding formula to improve failing schools.”

---

343 Reville Interview, supra note 69. See also Blum Interview, supra note 125.
345 Id.
346 Senator Antonioni, then senate chair of the joint education committee, declined to sign on to the bill because he did not think that significant new money would be involved in any new education reform efforts. Id.; Blum Interview, supra note 125.
348 See Blum Interview, supra note 125.
The court’s recognition of its own institutional constraints and correct assessment of the lack of political interest in providing substantial additional funding for underperforming districts helps to explain why the SJC refused to order Judge Botsford’s proposed remedies. It does not, however, adequately explain why the SJC refused to find that the Commonwealth was violating its constitutional duty to educate plaintiff children. Justice Greaney, who was most vocal during oral argument in expressing concerns about implementing a judicial remedy, supported a finding of liability for the Commonwealth. In addition, many legislators and policy elites agreed that the Commonwealth was violating its constitutional duty, at least as articulated by McDuffy. A finding of a constitutional violation without specifying a remedy would likely not have precipitated a major conflict between the legislative and judicial branches. Nonetheless, the SJC still found that the Commonwealth was fulfilling its constitutional duty to “cherish the interests of public schools.” This was largely because the plurality believed that the Commonwealth had acted in good faith to improve education in the plaintiff districts and comply with the McDuffy ruling and was on the right path to success. This belief was bolstered by the fact that Massachusetts was a high-performing state and many of its efforts were nationwide models for education reform.

1. The Commonwealth’s Good Faith and Correct Path

Both at oral argument and in the written opinions, the justices expressed the belief that the Commonwealth had acted in good faith to remedy constitutional violations and was on the correct path to success, and that the court should therefore not get involved. At oral argument, Justice Sosman stated, “Whatever the situation in particular districts, we are not confronted with a recalcitrant legislature that has refused to do anything to address these educational flaws.” Similarly, Chief Justice

---

352 The distinction between courts as finders of violations versus crafters of remedies underlies Judge Botsford’s suggestion that the SJC might have decided Hancock differently on the constitutional violation question if she had limited her report to only finding a constitutional violation and not crafting a politically controversial remedy. See Botsford Interview, supra note 207.


354 See Roosevelt, supra note 323, at 87, 88; Barrios interview, supra note 299. See generally supra, Part II.B.

355 See Hancock, 822 N.E.2d at 1136.

356 Audio tape of Hancock Oral Argument, supra note 19.
Marshall explained, “The commonwealth, DOE, has every interest in seeing every child educated. It has proceeded in good faith.”

The plurality opinion could not say enough about how the Commonwealth had made a serious, good faith effort to improve education throughout the state. Chief Justice Marshall explained that “the legislative and executive branches have shown that they have embarked on a long-term, measurable, orderly, and comprehensive process of reform.” She contrasted the Massachusetts experience with reform efforts in New Jersey and New York, where

The respective courts stepped in, only reluctantly, after many years of legislative failure or inability to enact education reforms and to commit resources to implement those reforms. . . . In sharp contrast, the Massachusetts Legislature and Governor responded . . . with a comprehensive and systematic overhaul of State financial aid to and oversight of public schools. The level of responsive, sustained, intense legislative commitment to public education established on the record in this case is the kind of government action the Abbott and CFE court, in the respective underlying cases, had hoped to see from their Legislatures, and reluctantly concluded would not be forthcoming without a detailed court order.

The justices also believed, as did many in political and public circles, that the Commonwealth was on the right track to improving underperforming districts and that additional funding was not the answer. For example, at oral argument, Justice Sosman asked Mr. Weisman, “What we have before us is information about four districts with some serious problems. What is irrational or wrong or unconstitutional about an approach that says ‘what we are going to do with those not doing well is go in and find out what the specific problem is, school by school’?”

Justice Cordy echoed that sentiment later in the argument. When Mr. Weisman argued that the state could not be expected to meet its constitu-

357 Id.
358 See, e.g., Hancock, 822 N.E.2d at 1155 (plurality opinion) (“Here, the independent branches of government have shown that they share the court’s concern, and that they are embracing and acting on their constitutional duty to educate all public school students”); id. at 1158 (“I am confident that the Commonwealth’s commitment to educating its children remains strong, and that the Governor and the Legislature will continue to work expeditiously to ‘provide a high quality public education to every child.’” (quoting MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 69, § 1 (2003))).
359 Id. at 1134, 1140.
360 Id. at 1153–54.
361 Audio tape of Hancock Oral Argument, supra note 19.
362 Id. Judge Cordy asked, “If you look at the individual districts and say, ‘why aren’t kids learning in these districts?’ then you can begin to quantify things. Some may be cost,
tional obligations without a study to show how much those obligations would cost, Chief Justice Marshall disagreed. She said that much more important than a costing out study would be figuring out why individual school districts and individual students were performing poorly, and that was not only a matter of money.\textsuperscript{363} Similarly, Justice Cordy suggested that accelerating the Department of Education’s assessment of underperforming schools would also be more important than a costing out study.\textsuperscript{364} Chief Justice Marshal also stated, “What... comes out to me loud and clear is that there are real problems in this district that have nothing to do with money.”\textsuperscript{365}

2. \textit{The Commonwealth’s Leadership and Success Nationwide}

As discussed above, Judge Botsford found that the curriculum frameworks were world class documents, the teacher certification requirements were among the most rigorous in the country, the school and district accountability system was one of the first of its kind in the United States, and the MCAS test was of high quality.\textsuperscript{366} The \textit{Hancock} plurality noted that the ERA had reduced, eliminated, or reversed spending gaps between districts based on property wealth,\textsuperscript{367} and that MCAS scores were improving in the focus districts.\textsuperscript{368} Brockton sixth graders scored one year and one month ahead of the national average on the Iowa Basic Skills test in language, six months ahead in math, and on par with the national average in reading.\textsuperscript{369} Judge Botsford also found that Massachusetts students performed at the highest levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test.\textsuperscript{370} In 2002, fourth graders scored second highest in the nation in writing and highest in reading, while eighth graders scored higher than students in forty-one other states in writing and higher than students in thirty-two states in reading.\textsuperscript{371} In 2003, fourth graders tied for first place in reading and math; eighth graders tied for first place in reading and second place in math.\textsuperscript{372}

\textsuperscript{363} At another point, Chief Justice Marshall again asked why doing a costing-out study would be important if fixing failing schools was not just about money, but also about district leadership, capacity, and other areas on which the Department was already focusing. \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{364} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{365} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{367} \textit{Hancock v. Comm’r of Educ.}, 822 N.E.2d 1134, 1147–48 (Mass. 2005).
\textsuperscript{368} \textit{Id.} at 1149–50.
\textsuperscript{369} \textit{Id.} at 1150.
\textsuperscript{370} \textit{Botsford Report}, 2004 WL 877984, at *15.
\textsuperscript{371} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{372} \textit{Id.}
While the court did not specifically state that Massachusetts' ranking among other states influenced its judgment that the Commonwealth had not violated its constitutional duty, this likely played a role in the *Hancock* decision. A number of people interviewed focused on Massachusetts' status as a nationwide education leader. Michael Weisman suggested that the fact that Massachusetts does so well on national rankings might have influenced *Hancock*. Senator Birmingham questioned how, given the Commonwealth's indisputable success on nationwide tests and studies, the plaintiffs could argue that the system did not pass the threshold question of constitutionality. And the Rhode Island Supreme Court, in a school finance challenge, found it "of particular interest and significance" that per-pupil expenditure in Rhode Island ranked sixth highest in the nation and only Hawaii and the District of Columbia had a more equalized per-pupil expenditure. It is likely that these types of considerations affected the *Hancock* court as well.

### III. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF COURTS IN SOCIAL CHANGE AND FOR FUTURE SCHOOL FINANCE LITIGATION

The *Hancock* decision has important implications for the role of courts in creating social change—specifically change in schools—and for plaintiffs that are contemplating school finance lawsuits. A number of scholars have suggested that courts cannot produce significant social change in the face of popular opposition. Some have claimed that this is particularly true in the area of school finance. McDuffy and *Hancock* provide partial, nuanced support for these theories but they also point in a different direction, one that has been less explored: regardless of a court's capacity to produce social change, a court might be unwilling to produce change in the face of popular opposition out of concern for judicial role and a fear of provoking inter-branch conflict. This reinforces the inter-connectedness of courts and the political branches of government, especially with regard to school finance. As for implications for future school finance suits, *Hancock* shows that courts may be unwilling to find constitutional liability in states where the political branches have engaged in a serious, sustained, successful effort to improve education in plaintiff districts. *Hancock* also shows that using objective performance

---

373 Reville Interview, supra note 69; Roney Interview, supra note 178.
374 Weisman Interview, supra note 50.
377 See infra Part III.A.
standards to support findings of educational inadequacy may not be the “Midas touch” that some scholars have predicted.

A. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF COURTS IN CREATING SOCIAL CHANGE

The McDuffy and Hancock decisions have important implications for the efficacy of courts in producing social change. In The Hollow Hope, Gerald Rosenberg argues that United States courts can almost never effectively produce significant social reform: “at best, they can second the social reform acts of other branches of government.” Due to the limited nature of constitutional rights, a lack of judicial independence, and a lack of implementation power, courts can only make an impact when political, social, and economic forces have already moved society substantially along a path to reform. Even then, courts may be merely reflecting societal reform rather than independently furthering it. Therefore, “[t]urning to courts to produce significant social reform substitutes the myth of American courts for its reality. It credits courts and judicial decisions with a power that they do not, allowing courts to “act as ‘fly-paper’ for social reformers who succumb to the lure of litigation.”

While not as pessimistic, Michael Klarman agrees that court decisions cannot fundamentally alter society. According to Klarman, judges generally reflect popular opinion and rarely hold views deviating far from it. Their decisions therefore reflect the dominant opinion of the time and place. As such, litigation will rarely help those most desperately in need; instead, judges are only likely to protect minority groups that are supported by the majority. “[J]ustices are too much products of their time and place to launch social revolutions. And, even if they had the inclination to do so, their capacity to coerce change is too heavily constrained.”

A number of scholars have applied these and other theories to the use of the courts to create social change specifically to the school finance

---

378 ROSENBERG, supra note 20, at 35. While Rosenberg concentrates on the role of the United States Supreme Court, his conclusions have implications for other courts, including state supreme courts.

379 These are Rosenberg’s three constraints, or the three main reasons why courts will not be effective change agents. Id. at 10–21.

380 Id. at 5–6.

381 Id. at 338.

382 Id. at 341.

383 KLARMAN, supra note 20, at 6. Professor Klarman also only focuses on the role of the United States Supreme Court, but his conclusions have implications for state supreme courts as well.

384 Id. at 449–50.

385 Id. at 468.
context. Many agree with Rosenberg, arguing that state supreme courts have failed to substantially reform school finance systems. William Koski posits that "courts in school finance cases are constrained by their inability to implement their policy decisions and the risk that their legitimacy may be compromised both by a legislative and executive branch unwilling to comply with the court's mandate."

The potential for inter-branch conflict may be particularly high in school finance litigation, where remedies such as additional funding or programmatic improvements are notoriously difficult to enforce. Therefore, courts might be in the best position to act when there is consensus among the political elite that school finance reform is necessary and policymakers merely require political "cover" from a court decision. John Dayton and Anne Dupre similarly contend that while court decisions may be helpful or even necessary to produce greater school finance equity, they are not sufficient. Therefore, if the end goal is to increase or improve funding for public schools, building political support is essential to producing meaningful, long-term reform.

Others agree, arguing that even when school finance plaintiffs win in court, judicial remedies are generally inadequate and constitutional rights are left under-enforced.

In contrast, Matthew Bosworth argues that courts are effective and are capable of making and oftentimes do make independent contributions to education policymaking. After studying school finance litigation in Kentucky, North Dakota, and Texas, Bosworth concludes that change would not have been possible in those states without court involvement. School finance reform advocates did not command a majority or a near majority in any of those state legislatures before the cases were decided, and state policymakers credited the courts with producing substantial change.

Ronald Dove also found that without the Kentucky Supreme Court's order, Kentucky's Education Reform Act of 1990 would not have passed. Nonetheless, he concluded that "a good litigation strat-

386 Koski, supra note 21, at 1082.
387 Id. at 1095.
388 Id. at 1082.
390 Id.
393 Id. at 219–20.
egy is not enough; lawyers must orchestrate a union of political, social and legal forces in support of their cause."

_McDuffy_ and _Hancock_ lend partial support to those who agree with Professors Rosenberg and Klarman that courts are unable and unlikely to produce significant social change in the face of popular opposition. They also demonstrate the inter-connectedness of courts and the political branches of government. As discussed above, the ERA was passed by the legislature a week before _McDuffy_ was decided; therefore it cannot be suggested that the court was creating social change in the face of legislative or popular opposition. However, the existence of the lawsuit in part drove the legislation, and the existence of the court order played a major role in the Act’s implementation. Thus, _McDuffy_ can be seen as part of the broader political education reform effort in Massachusetts, in which the court and the political branches both played an important role.

_Hancock_ is different because the SJC did not attempt to produce change. Instead, it refused to act, partially out of fear of provoking inter-branch conflict. This fear was grounded in the court’s implicit belief that there was a lack of political support for the plaintiffs’ proposed remedies. While the willingness, rather than the capacity, of courts to produce change has not received sustained scholarly attention, some school finance scholars have addressed how courts perceive their own institutional competence and how that perception might affect a court’s willingness to attempt to produce change. William Koski contends that judges engage in an “overtly political analysis” whereby they consider if political elites support education finance reform. If they do not, judges may reflect on the fact that unpopular court decisions can be ignored and can ultimately undermine court legitimacy and effectiveness. Judges may fear that their institutional legitimacy will be called into question and may therefore refuse to intervene in the education policymaking of the political branches. Michael Heise agrees, suggesting that because court decisions might not be able to change school finance outcomes, courts might choose not to “pick a potential constitutional

---

395 Id.
396 Koski, supra note 21, at 1228.
397 Id. at 1090, 1101.
398 Id. at 1228–29. Koski explains that this appears to have been the case in Ohio. See id. at 1229. Plaintiffs claimed that the legislature had failed to comply with the court’s earlier order to create a constitutional system of school financing. See DeRolph v. State, 754 N.E.2d 1184, 1195–96 (Ohio 2001). The court did not find that the legislature was in compliance or that the system was constitutional, but refused to act nonetheless. The court explained, “None of us is completely comfortable with the decision we announce in this opinion. But... we have reached the point where, while continuing to hold our previously expressed opinions, the greater good requires us to recognize ‘the necessity of sacrificing our opinions sometimes to the opinions of others for the sake of harmony.’... In that spirit, we have created the consensus that should terminate the role of this court in the dispute.” Id. at 1189–90.
fight when the outcome is not obvious.\textsuperscript{399} Similarly, George Brown suggests that state supreme courts may fear the political consequences of ordering explicit remedies in school finance cases because they fear direct conflict with the legislative branch.\textsuperscript{400} Michael Heise also points out that courts may have one view of their institutional role when it comes to articulating a constitutional right to an education and another view when it comes to ordering a specific remedy.\textsuperscript{401}

\textit{Hancock} provides support for and goes beyond these theories. As discussed above, during oral argument, Justice Greaney asked what the court was supposed to do if it ordered the legislature to implement a remedy and the legislature refused. He explained that before making constitutional orders, courts must consider how they are going to enforce the orders. Greaney specifically referred to the SJC's remedial orders in the clean elections case and the "stalemate" that ensued between the court and the legislature.\textsuperscript{402} \textit{Hancock} therefore points towards the importance of focusing on the willingness, rather than merely on the capacity, of courts to produce significant social change and the interconnectedness of courts and legislatures. In \textit{Hancock}, the court's hesitance seems to stem from its experience with previous inter-branch conflicts and its assessment of the lack of political support for additional funding for poor school districts. However, this is surely only one of many factors. More research is necessary to understand the conditions under which courts might fear imposing social change in the face of popular or legislative opposition. Similarly, \textit{Hancock} suggests that school finance attorneys and all attorneys who urge courts to create social change must focus on the legislative sphere in addition to the judicial sphere. This is true not only in terms of winning political support from the legislative and executive branches, but also then conveying that support back to the court. If courts are going to, in part, base their willingness to act on their perception of the political support for a given issue, then attorneys must focus on presenting courts with evidence that the political branches and the public support their cause and their requested relief.\textsuperscript{403}

**B. IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL FINANCE SUITS**

\textit{Hancock} also has important implications for those contemplating bringing school finance suits. The most important lesson is that advocates should be wary of bringing school finance cases in states where the legislature has created a foundation budget or some other form of guar-

\textsuperscript{399} Heise, supra note 176, at 98.
\textsuperscript{400} Brown, supra note 176, at 554.
\textsuperscript{401} Heise, supra note 176, at 94.
\textsuperscript{402} See supra Part II.A.
\textsuperscript{403} The plaintiffs did not do this successfully in \textit{Hancock}. 
anteed funding and has made a good faith effort to improve educational opportunities in plaintiff districts and equalize per-pupil spending among districts. This remains true even when students in plaintiff districts fail to meet state standards and perform well below average on state mandated performance evaluations. These two lessons are discussed in turn.

1. Legislative Good Faith Effort and Success

A few school finance scholars have theorized that a court will not find that a state has violated its constitutional duty if it has genuinely tried to equalize per-pupil funding or otherwise guarantee that students receive an adequate education. Jonathan Banks argues that “[o]nly when courts conclude that their legislature is unwilling or unable to pass effective remedial legislation will they intervene.”404 After studying a number of school finance decisions, he found that frustration with legislative inaction was a factor in every case that plaintiffs won.405 Therefore “frustration with the legislature may be the real key to successful finance reform challenges.”406 This may be even more true for remedial litigation such as Hancock. George Brown explains that, like McDuffy, many courts initially issue a finding of constitutional liability without specifying a remedy. “This situation puts the court in a difficult position if the matter returns to it, a distinct possibility in school finance cases. To the extent that the legislature has tried to follow the court’s advice, it will be difficult to strike down that action.”407

This makes sense on a theoretical level and is practically supported by Hancock. Theoretically courts should not get involved in education policy unless the legislative and executive branches have proven incapable of addressing or unwilling to address constitutional violations. Practically, there are two reasons why this is so. First, if the legislative and executive branches have engaged in a serious effort to improve educational outcomes, like in Hancock, then support for a plaintiff’s adequacy suit among policy elites, the public, and the political branches will likely be lacking. As discussed above, this could mean that a court will be unable to achieve real reform or unwilling to even attempt reform out of fear of inter-branch conflict. Second, even if a court does not fear inter-branch conflict, it might be unwilling to get involved in a school finance lawsuit if it thinks that the political branches of government have taken their constitutional responsibilities seriously and are on the right path to success because it might believe its involvement is unnecessary. As dis-

405 Id. at 155.
406 Id. at 157.
407 Brown, supra note 176, at 566.
cussed above, the Hancock plurality opinion was adamant that the Commonwealth had made a serious, good faith effort to improve education in the plaintiff districts and was on the correct path to success. The opinion specifically contrasted Massachusetts’ experience with New Jersey’s, where the Abbott court determined that its involvement was necessary only after years of legislative recalcitrance. Therefore, advocates should be wary of bringing school finance suits in states where there is a perception that the political branches have acted in good faith to fulfill their constitutional obligations.

2. Adequacy Suits and Objective Performance Measures

This counseled hesitance towards school finance litigation in states that have not been plagued by legislative inaction or recalcitrance is no less true when objective state performance measures support the plaintiffs’ case. Many scholars have proposed that using accountability measures to support adequacy litigation may be a successful new approach for school finance plaintiffs. Michael Heise contends that the standards movement made it easier for plaintiffs to win school finance suits by allowing plaintiffs to define adequate funding as the level of funding necessary for all school districts and students to meet state education standards. “Thus, a new wave of litigation may be upon us, one that turns the states’ efforts to improve achievement through standards against the state and enables school districts to gain financially from their inability to perform at desired levels.” John Dayton and Anne Dupre suggest that using outcome-based standards might give school funding plaintiffs “the ‘Midas touch’ as they attempt to turn student performance failure into gold.” Molly McUsic comments that adequacy claims owe their growing success to the standards movement because it saved plaintiffs and judges from having to define the content of an adequate education. Similarly, Thomas Saunders counsels that plaintiffs can

---

408 See supra Part II.C.1.
409 Paul Reville pointed out the irony of this situation. School finance plaintiffs are often the people who are most vehemently opposed to accountability measures. However, in adequacy litigation, accountability measures are often helpful and are therefore embraced by plaintiffs who decry them in other aspects of their work. Reville Interview, supra note 69.
410 Michael Heise, Educational Jujitsu: How School Finance Lawyers Learned to Turn Standards and Accountability into Dollars, EDUC. NEXT, Fall 2002, at 31, 32.
411 Id.
412 Dayton & Dupre, supra note 389, at 2397.
rely on the failure to meet state standards to secure relief under a constitutional Education Clause.\textsuperscript{414}

Some commentators have recognized potential problems with holding states liable whenever students or districts fail to meet objective performance criteria. James S. Liebman asks, "[A]re judges likely—and should they be encouraged—to interpret every expression of aspirational educational policy as an enforceable commitment[?]"\textsuperscript{415} However, Tico Almeida suggests that in the age of "high-stakes testing," when failure to perform satisfactorily on state tests can mean non-promotion or inability to graduate high school, "courts may no longer be able to claim credibly that state education standards constitute only aspirational goals" and should not be enforced in adequacy suits.\textsuperscript{416}

	extit{Hancock} proves that some courts may refuse to hold states responsible for objective student performance outcomes as long as the state has acted in good faith to improve education in plaintiff districts. Judge Botsford found that the curriculum frameworks defined the content of the Commonwealth's constitutional duty to provide students with an education, and "[t]he ... MCAS test was developed in response to the ERA's mandate that a system of student assessments be created."\textsuperscript{417} She found that none of the plaintiff districts were implementing the curriculum frameworks for all students or equipping all students with the McDuffy capabilities.\textsuperscript{418} In addition, in 2003, 18 to 29\% of tenth graders in the four focus districts failed the MCAS ELA test; 32 to 47\% failed the mathematics test.\textsuperscript{419} These scores were lower than the state average and significantly lower than the scores in the comparison districts.\textsuperscript{420} In that same year, due to MCAS scores, Brockton did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in mathematics, Lowell did not make AYP in ELA, Springfield did not make AYP in ELA or math, and Winchendon did not make AYP in ELA or math for the student subgroups of special education and free/reduced-price lunch.\textsuperscript{421}

The \textit{Hancock} court accepted Judge Botsford's findings but did not hold that the Commonwealth was violating its constitutional duty to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{417} Hancock \textit{ex rel.} Hancock v. Driscoll (Botsford Report), No. 02-2978, 2004 WL 877984, at *8, 16 (Mass. Super. Apr. 26, 2004).
\textsuperscript{418} Id. at *143.
\textsuperscript{419} See id. at *113.
\textsuperscript{420} Id.
\textsuperscript{421} Id. at *114–15.
\end{flushright}
cherish the interests of public schools. The fact that the MCAS test was “high stakes,” in that in order to graduate from high school a Massachusetts student must pass the ELA and math portions of the test, was not even discussed. Likewise, the court did not find it constitutionally problematic or even relevant that students in plaintiff districts failed to meet state standards. Therefore, predictions that standards-based reform or state accountability measures will become a “Midas touch” for plaintiffs in adequacy lawsuits are overblown. The Hancock court was far more interested in the efforts made by the Commonwealth than in the outcomes achieved by students in plaintiff districts.

CONCLUSION

School finance reformers in Massachusetts have much debated the consequences of the Hancock decision. Some see Hancock as the worst possible loss, a decision that the Massachusetts legislature has taken as the SJC’s “imprimatur to produce budgets without any education initiatives.” Others see hope in the fact that a majority of the court reaffirmed McDuffy and all seven justices adopted Judge Botsford’s findings. Michael Weisman went as far as to call Hancock “relatively insignificant from a legal perspective.” Current Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick clearly does not understand Hancock to be permission from the SJC to ignore school funding. He appointed a task force, lead by Paul Reville, to advise him on a number of education issues, including school finance, and announced his interest in reexamining the state’s school financing scheme, stating, “The property tax is not working.” On June 1, 2007, during a commencement address at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Patrick announced a comprehensive education reform plan, calling for universal preschool, full-day kindergarten, and a longer school day and year for Massachusetts public schools. He also appointed Judge Botsford to the Supreme Judicial Court; she was sworn in on September 4, 2007.

423 Birmingham Interview, supra note 120. Judge Botsford agreed and said that the greatest tragedy of Hancock was that education reform would not happen without pressure from the court. Botsford Interview, supra note 207.
424 See Blum Interview, supra note 125. Joanne Blum also explained that the MTA used Hancock in its early negotiations with current Massachusetts Governor, Deval Patrick. The message was, “you guys aren’t really off the hook. The hook may not be as big as we hoped it would be, but you still have a constitutional obligation.” Id.
425 See Weisman Interview, supra note 50.
426 Warrinsness, supra note 17, at A1.
427 Sacchetti, Governor Stirs Graduates, supra note 17, at B1; Patrick Seeks Free Two-Year State Colleges, Goal is Key in “Cradle to Career” Plan, BOSTON GLOBE, June 1, 2007, at A1.
428 See LeBlanc, supra note 207.
Yet, despite the Governor’s interest in education reform and finance, the power of the ambiguity surrounding the *McDuffy* standard as a tool for motivating political leaders has been lost. Senator Birmingham explained that after *McDuffy* was decided, it was unclear whether the court would try to enforce the seven *McDuffy* capabilities or whether the capabilities were merely aspirational. The uncertainty was used as a prod to convince legislators to do more to ensure that all children received an adequate education as defined by the court. This was particularly helpful during the implementation of the ERA. However, *Hancock* removed this tool when it clarified that the *McDuffy* capabilities were not enforceable and that the legislature would be judged based on effort, not results. Most legislators responded: “[g]reat, we don’t need to worry about this. We have enough other things competing for the dime . . . . If the court says we can get to it later, we’ll get to it later.”

There is also speculation that Springfield, one of the focus districts in *Hancock*, might bring another school finance suit. However, anyone considering school finance litigation, or any type of litigation that urges a court to create social change, should first look closely at the lessons of *McDuffy* and *Hancock*.

Both *McDuffy* and *Hancock* illustrate the inter-connectedness of courts and politics. *McDuffy* shows that it is possible for courts to create social change, or at least to be an important part of a larger social change movement, when there is substantial political support for change among policy elites, the public, and the political branches of government. Between 1993 and 2002, state aid to Massachusetts public schools increased from approximately $1.6 billion to $4 billion, spending gaps between districts were reversed or reduced, and schools experienced fewer of the extreme resource shortages that were hallmarks of the pre-*McDuffy* era. Most people would agree that many Massachusetts schools tangibly changed during this period. On the other hand, *Hancock* demonstrates that courts might intentionally avoid attempting to create change out of fear of provoking inter-branch conflict or concerns regarding judicial role. This type of concern will only be neutralized if there is substantial political support for the plaintiffs’ remedies. This too demonstrates the inter-relatedness of courts and politics when it comes to school finance.

---

429 See Birmingham Interview, supra note 120.
430 See id.
431 Barrios Interview, supra note 299.
432 See Botsford Interview, supra note 207.
434 Id. at *14.
Lastly, *Hancock* establishes that even where institutional constraints are not relevant, such as in finding a constitutional violation rather than ordering a judicial remedy, courts might refuse to impose constitutional liability if they perceive that the legislative and executive branches of government have undertaken a serious, good-faith effort to minimize funding disparities and improve education in underperforming school districts, and are on the path to success. This will be true even in cases where plaintiffs can rely on objective performance data to show that children in their districts are not being provided with the state-required education. Therefore, advocates should be wary of bringing social change litigation in states where there is a perception that the political branches have acted in good faith to fulfill their constitutional obligations. They should also consider whether, given the political contexts of their particular states, even a successful school finance lawsuit will lead to a tangible improvement for students.