

A wise and beautiful book that elevates the level of debate on tests and school reform.\*  
—Jonathan Kozol

DEBORAH MEIER

Author of *THE POWER OF THEIR IDEAS*

IN  
SCHOOLS  
WE  
TRUST

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING  
IN AN ERA OF TESTING AND STANDARDIZATION



## In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization

*Deborah Meier*

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# **In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization**

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## **In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization**

Deborah Meier

We are in an era of radical distrust of public education. Increasingly, we turn to standardized tests and standardized curricula-now adopted by all fifty states-as our national surrogates for trust.

Legendary school founder and reformer Deborah Meier believes fiercely that schools have to win our faith by showing they can do their job. But she argues just as fiercely that standardized testing is precisely the wrong way to that end. The tests themselves, she argues, cannot give the results they claim. And in the meantime, they undermine the kind of education we actually want.

In this multilayered exploration of trust and schools, Meier critiques the ideology of testing and puts forward a different vision, forged in the success stories of small public schools she and her colleagues have created in Boston and New York. These nationally acclaimed schools are built, famously, around trusting teachers-and students and parents-to use their own judgment.

Meier traces the enormous educational value of trust; the crucial and complicated trust between parents and teachers; how teachers need to become better judges of each others' work; how race and class complicate trust at all levels; and how we can begin to 'scale up' from the kinds of successes she has created.

## **In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization Details**

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## **From Reader Review In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization for online ebook**

### **Lisa says**

An extremely compelling book that is even more relevant then when it was published in 2002, as the push for standardization and the bleeding of resources has become even stronger.

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### **Manderson says**

I'm extremely happy someone recommended this book to me. Let me put it to you this way: I began going back through the book to pull out quotes that had struck me, and found I could almost quote the entire book! Meier is one of the few voices speaking in the field of education that I feel I can trust: she balances hard-won insight from the front-lines with her broader perspectives on educational policy, reforms, and philosophy. She doesn't offer prescriptive answers, and is constantly testing her own assumptions. She says so well all the things that I've been just beginning to sense and intuit as true as I begin my career in education. Now I have a source and a reference for those inklings! Read this book if you are interested in education reform. Meier is the real deal.

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### **Tara says**

I have a lot of respect for Deborah Meier and very much agree with her viewpoints on education and the ridiculous testing of our era. Still, I was disappointed that there wasn't more NEW information in this book - stuff that I haven't read elsewhere. I did like her discussion about the ambiguity of test answers; it's nice to see that someone reputable agrees that the multiple-choice questions posed on elementary reading tests are confusing. I often feel that more than one answer works and that I can defend more than one choice. How can learning be assessed with these types of tests?

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### **Carol says**

Less progressive and more moderate than I expected. Most interesting part is the criticism of bias in testing. The examples are eye-opening and left me wanting more.

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### **Jenna says**

If you are an educator, I highly recommend this book. Even if you aren't an educator, but really want to know what is and should be going on in schools, this is a great read. There is a lot of controversy going on about No Child Left Behind and what it has done to the schools. Deborah Meier is a former teacher who

discusses what it has done to schools and what schools should actually look like when they have the kids best interest at heart.

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### **Erin says**

Nothing I didn't already know, but reassuring to see it in print.

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### **Lizzy says**

She speaks TRUTH! A vision of public schools I can believe in!

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### **Jonna Higgins-Freese says**

I enjoyed this book. Much of what she said seemed sensible to me -- that trust and accountability can't, in the end, be legislated, but are to be found in relationships and the particularities of individual people.

Favorite passages:

This articulated one of my own fundamental difficulties with taking my first child to public school. We visited (as we were trying to decide whether to go to private school instead) but were repeatedly asked at the public school why we wanted to visit. It was so I could answer the question: "Am I comfortable leaving my child here?":

"At Mission Hill we insist that parents visit before they make any final decision, alhtough teh citywide mandatory choice system does not require this. Why? So they can look at our classrooms and ask, am I comfortable leaving my kid in this place? It's a question not of agreeing with everything we do, I tell them, but of feeling safe with our making important decisions . . . What I offer as a teacher, after all, is not just an acceptable babysitting expereince but rather, like my doctor, professional expertise. What kind of evidence of my trustworthiness can parents legitimately demand? What kinds of questions are they entitled to have answers to? How should parents balance trust and skepticism?"

"One might wish all third graders could read the Harry Potter books; but is this goal reasonable? . . . reading the California art standards for kindergarten, one is inclined to think that test makers had in mind the scope and sequence for a postdoctoral program in the arts."

In regard to standards and standardized tests, she references Fairtest

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### **Kieran says**

Nice discussion on standardized testing vs. standards.

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### **Daniela says**

This book is phenomenal. It is Meier's idea for how to fix schools. EVERY teacher should read this book.

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### **Grace says**

While her argument about the importance of trust in schools being essential, and the detrimental impact of standardized testing on said trusted relationship is compelling, I also think it's impractical in the way public schools are run in America.

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### **Nshslibrary says**

As a lifelong educator and reform advocate, Deborah Meier certainly has the experience needed to tackle the issues presented in her book, *In Schools We Trust*. Meier writes passionately and convincingly by drawing from personal stories to present lessons learned: “hard-won, democratic trust in each other, tempered by healthy, active skepticism and a demand that trust be continually earned” is necessary for parents, teachers, and the government in order to create the “communities of learning” our society so desperately needs (3).

One of the most enjoyable elements of Meier’s writing is her uncompromising attitude and “faith in the extraordinary drive and capacity of all children to learn and in the ability of ordinary adults to be powerful, active citizens in a democracy” (3). As a founder of the Mission Hills School in Boston, Meier has experienced and seen her fair share of troubles and failures. Instead of dwelling on them, she turns them around and presents idea after idea on how to better communication, decision-making, or whatever it is that needs to be improved. Meier is also willing to delve into uncomfortable topics, such as the issues of critiquing colleagues and racial tensions, in order to discuss what it is that can be changed, all so that schools can be “a place where [children] dare to challenge themselves to go beyond their customary limits, and even beyond the viewpoint of their families and communities -- to explore the wider world” (57).

It is also important to note that in parts two and three, the sections where Meier takes on the inadequacy of standardized testing and the implications of “scaling up” from successful schools, readers might get lost in certain passages that require previous knowledge of the history of education reform. Of course, Meier does seem to expect to be writing more for an audience of educators than one of high-school students, and this issue does not take away from the impact it leaves on the reader.

Overall, Meier’s plea for education reform is loud and clear: each one of us must work together to make our education system the best it can be, and that can only start with trust in each other and in ourselves. A book that will make you rethink what you believe about education reform, *In Schools We Trust* definitely deserves the hype it has gotten since its release. ~ Student: Charissa L.

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### **Laura says**

I like the way Meier writes and this had some interesting data to ponder. However, although the kinds of schools she supports are interesting to me, I wanted her to spend more time describing them and explaining their accountability structures, though of course her whole point is that we should trust educators - an argument that sounds nice, but when it comes down to it, I'm not sure I fully agree. I mostly skimmed my way through, as no ideas as presented here really caught my imagination.

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### **Melissa says**

I don't feel like this book had a lot to say, or a lot of successful solutions to offer... aside from the assertion that we all need to trust each other, schools, and teachers more... and that smaller schools would be advantageous. Interested to have the book club discussion.

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### **Joel says**

A compelling critique of high-stakes standardized testing, as well as a strong argument for small schools. Probably only of interest to teachers-to-be and teachers.

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### **Pashew Majeed says**

I was recently in a conference where the writer had a the keynote, she had a great speech that made me stretch my hands to my pen and notebook to keep what she said in mind. I am currently reading another one of hers (The Power of Their Ideas) and have read (Many Child left behind), So I plan to write a reflection on all them together and I am gonna put them in here too.

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