

TEN PEOPLE WHO SHAPED THE DECADE

ACTIVISTS TAKE ON SCHOOLS

# A MOM AND POP SHOP

*What Do Schools Need? Parent Power, Says Kevin Walker.*

BY RACHEL HARTIGAN

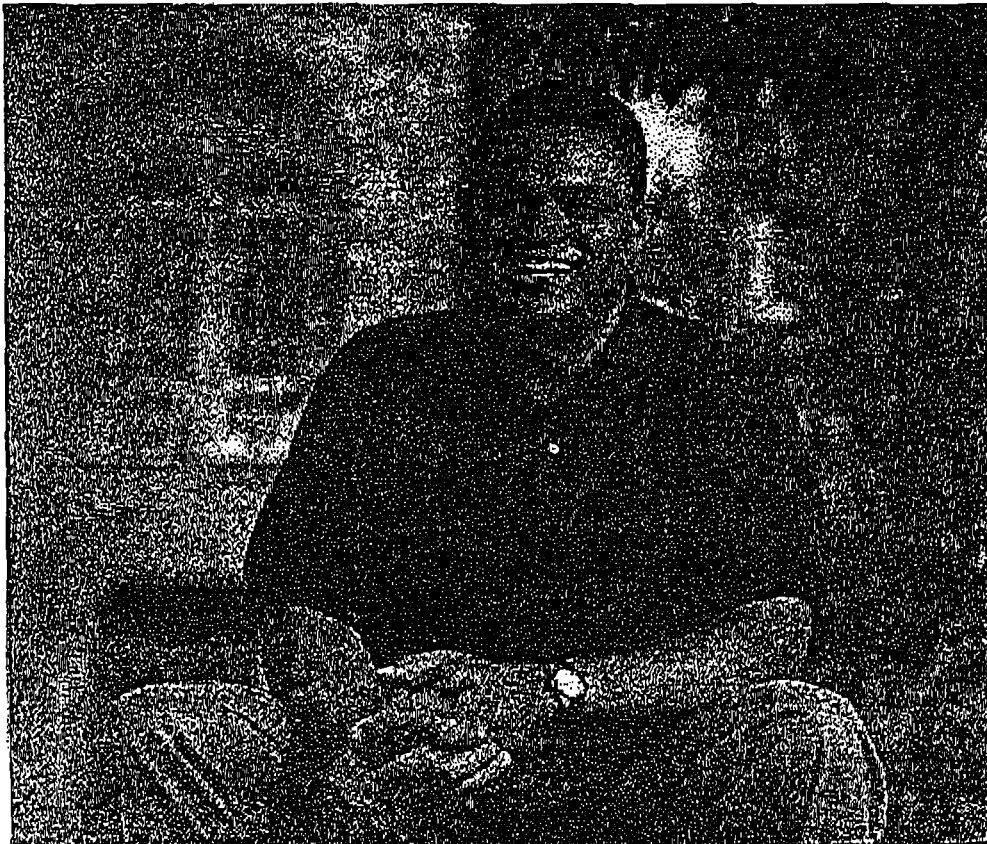
**T**he era of the bake sale is nearly over. The last decade has seen traditional forms of parent involvement in schools usurped by more activist models. Rather than selling raffle tickets, parents in Kentucky serve on school site-based management committees. #Texas parents don't just sign report cards; they weigh in on whether a new math curriculum is "educationally deficient." Moms and dads everywhere, no longer content to show up at school just once a year for open house, park themselves on campus at "parent centers."

To Kevin Walker, the age of the parent activist has arrived none too soon. A former political organizer—he worked for Walter Mondale's failed presidential campaign and the star-crossed movement to draft Mario Cuomo for a White House bid—he runs Project Appleseed, a nonprofit group that helps parents shed their timid, "teachers know best" attitudes and dive into the nitty-gritty of schools and dive into the nitty-

gritty of schools and education policy. Like other boosters of parent involvement in schools, the 39-year-old Walker contends that the fate of public education hinges on turning the average mom and dad into players in the school reform arena. "I want parents to be involved in policy," he says. "It goes beyond just having input."

Schools have been deluged with "input" during the '90s. Politicians, businessmen, and community leaders have all made school business their business. Even Star Wars creator George Lucas is throwing his clout and money around to influence schools. But the people with the most at stake are parents. For years, they've been demanding that school officials fix failing schools. Now they are realizing that nothing will change unless they do some of the heavy lifting themselves. "If we wait for others, the problems will never get solved," says Charles Olson of Parents for Public Schools, a Mississippi-based advocacy organization that has set up chapters in 22 states since its founding in 1989. "We're not going to wait any longer."

Kevin Walker came to this conclusion in the early 1990s. Having withdrawn from the itinerant life of a veteran campaigner to spend more time with his young children, he heard that his suburban St. Louis school district was inviting parents to participate in strategic planning. Walker accepted the invitation and, bitten by the reform bug, founded a small parents' group that eventually evolved into the local chapter of Parents for Public Schools. He soon became the Midwestern regional director of PPS, leading a successful lobbying campaign to force Missouri's



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Tenth Anniversary Issue

# TEN PEOPLE

## *Who Shaped*

# THE DECADE

**H**istory is often the study of the leaders, the politicians, the generals, the powers that be. But when it comes to telling the story of education in the '90s, the usual suspects merit little more than a footnote. Behind each of the dominant trends of the 1990s--the advance of technology, the curriculum wars, the push for teacher quality, to name a few--there was not one person but hundreds. Some were education insiders, of course, but others had not set foot in a classroom for years. Some purposefully sought change, while others inadvertently set the stage for it. And while some influenced policy, others transformed school culture and traditional attitudes toward education.

Here, then, are profiles of 10 such people. Though the '90s have seen two 'education presidents' and at least a dozen 'education governors', these 10 and others like them are the decade's most influential people.