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'Mass Education' Overdue for an Overhaul

"We're operating factory schools in a boutique world," says Patricia Kokinos, author of *Angel Park*, a novel about transforming public education and rescuing the American Dream. "The system itself, the structure of how schools run, needs to be reexamined and reinvented," she says. "We continue to train our kids to be cogs in a machine, bouncing along a conveyor belt, instead of individuals who need to be coached and empowered. That very mass education model, which may have worked for past generations, is overdue for an overhaul."

The controversial new novel, named one of ten national finalists for Book of the Year in Literary Fiction by *Foreword Magazine*, was also a winner of Editors Choice, Publishers Choice, and Readers Choice awards from iUniverse. Kokinos sold her first foreign rights to a Turkish publisher, which is coming out with a Turkish edition of *Angel Park* in time for the 2008 Istanbul Book Fair. She has also been presented an IRWIN award in the Best Fiction category by the Book Publicists of Southern California.

Kokinos will share her views at two Ventura Barnes & Noble book events, a discussion and signing on April 5th at 6 p.m. and an appearance as special guest at the Barnes & Noble Educators Reception on April 26th from 1 to 3 p.m. She will also sign her books at the Los Angeles Times Book Festival at UCLA on April 27th, appearing in two booths during the day.

Lauded for "stellar writing" by the *Ventura County Reporter*, the novel has gained notice for the inside story it reveals about the forces that are holding American schools hostage: power politics, racism, blind tradition, unchecked ego. The fictional world that Kokinos creates in *Angel Park* shrinks the public education issue down to human size so the reader can relate to the personal struggles of the characters and feel the emotional toll of continuing "business as usual."

"What parents want more than anything is for someone to take a personal interest in their kids, to coach and support them and help them succeed—and teachers who see 150 kids rotating through each classroom every day are powerless to do that," Kokinos says. "Drop-outs continue to rise, gangs continue to thrive, prisons continue to fill, welfare continues to expand—and we still haven't stepped back far enough to see that the school system itself needs a complete overhaul."

A veteran educator who has been a high school English teacher and then a school and district administrator on both sides of the country, Kokinos says her novel exposes the inner workings of schools, those forces and attitudes that prevent public education from making meaningful advances. "The piece-meal changes we've all been working with inside the system for the past 30 years are simply not getting the job done," she says.

Promoted by the publisher as an innovative "philosophical mystery," *Angel Park* leads the heroine to a startling conclusion, where her own transformation points the way to the vast changes schools and the nation need to make to put meaning back into the American Dream. "What we need most is a new perspective," Kokinos says, "getting rid of the idea of schools as impersonal testing factories, and creating small, responsive schools for every child in the country, right up through middle school and high school."

Kokinos has appeared on the Lifestyle Radio Network and numerous local stations, including KNX News Radio in Los Angeles. She recently did a podcast on the Big Media USA network with January Jones. Her novel, *Angel Park* is available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com. More information about school reform is available on her website, www.changetheschools.com.