

Foreword

The United States of America are not united when it comes to education. We have 50 states with 50 sets of standards for their educational systems. Admittedly, the Constitution of our great country placed the obligation for the development and administration of public schools on the backs of the states. Consequently, our 50 states have fiercely guarded that prerogative in the past and, until recently, fought off attempts by our federal government to interfere in education matters.

It was Lyndon Johnson who, in 1965, shepherded the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) through Congress, signaling the first large-scale incursion of the federal government into education. Under the civil rights banner, ESEA attempted to equalize the playing field for the children of poverty. Federal dollars would flow to school districts with large concentrations of poor children to ensure that they would have an equal opportunity to receive a quality education. For more than 30 years, school district accountability for the funds received was restricted to reports about how federal funds were spent. The districts and schools receiving federal dollars had annual reports to file with the Department of Education (DOE). With the reauthorization of ESEA, popularly known as No Child Left Behind, the federal role expanded to include all schools. Today, every public school in America must make Adequate Yearly Progress on state exams and evaluate teachers according to student performance on state and local tests.

In recent years, the specter of global competition has extended to education with international academic competitions that do not flatter the performance of American students. By comparison to countries like Finland, Singapore, and most recently Shanghai

(not a country, by the way, but a Chinese province), our students do not fare well. We can debate whether the comparisons with much smaller countries and a province are fair. At some point, we must recognize that our students participating in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) learn in 50 states with 50 different standards. It seems obvious that we would be better off if we, like the countries we compete with, had one set of national standards. Thus, the dilemma—our states do not want the federal government imposing a set of standards, yet in addition to international competitions, there are many reasons why our schools would benefit from national standards.

The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have been the prime movers of the common core standards, an attempt to get all 50 states to agree to a national standard for K–12 education and not one imposed by the federal government. To help expedite the process, the U.S. DOE has awarded two grants for the development of instruments that would assess student progress toward the common core standards. A number of states have adopted the standards, and many school districts are now grappling with the task of developing curriculum and instructional materials and strategies for the classroom. It is precisely at this point that Bob Manley and Rich Hawkins have authored *Making the Common Core Standards Work* because they want America's schools to be world-class learning centers.

America is great. Its education system is part of that greatness. But, as Manley and Hawkins point out in this book, the measure of our greatness is changing because the world is changing. Educators have a part to play: School leaders and teachers must adapt to the new standards or fade away. The authors clearly argue why we must choose the former. They hit many topics, beginning with what the CCSS are and why they are important. They show us why we must give our children the tools to excel by elevating and transforming what we consider as the high standards of today into the basic standards of tomorrow.

Manley and Hawkins provide a model for implementing the standards. I particularly appreciate their approach of using inquiry to promote dialogue. Throughout the process, they remain mindful of what may already exist in each school district so as not to recreate the wheel. They also provide valuable data and target specific grades

and subject matters as they focus on common core implementation and its impact on curriculum and school management and culture.

The authors acknowledge the current attacks on public education, and I agree with their point that vilifying teachers and administrators is neither the answer nor likely to facilitate change. Yes, budgets are tight. Yes, funding is limited. Tenure, performance measures, and benefit packages are key issues in the new millennium, along with student performance. But, there is one fact that is consistently ignored: America's public schools today are the best that they have ever been.

Scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for fourth and eighth grade reading and math are the highest they have ever been. Graduation rates are the highest they have ever been, while the dropout rate is the lowest. College enrollment is at an all-time high, while high school courses are the most rigorous ever. While our students' performance on the TIMSS are not as high as we would want them to be, they have improved with every administration and are above the international average. According to the most recent Gallop Poll, parents' satisfaction with the schools their children attend is the highest ever. Yet, are we satisfied with average performance? Can American schools raise student learning to competitive world standards? Yes, we can.

We are the best that we have ever been, but we are not as good as we want to be, particularly when it comes to the education of our African American and Latino students that comprise the bulk of the population in the dropout factories of America. The CCSS could pave the way for a brighter future for American education, and Bob Manley and Rich Hawkins provide us with the practical strategies to get us there.

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