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ABSTRACT

Issues in the debate over national education standards for content and performance are examined in this journal issue. Interviews with three individuals in different areas of education were held, and each is described in narrative style by Anne Turnbaugh Lockridge. The first is with Linda Darling-Hammond, director of the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Training. She points to other initiatives for improving student achievement, such as equalized school financing and the provision of resources for teacher recruitment and education. In the second interview, Deborah Meier, the principal and co-founder of the Central Park Elementary Schools in New York City, expresses opposition to the standardization of standards. She argues for the "habits of mind" as developed in her schools, and draws from her own years in public education to illustrate her points. The third interview is with William Fernekes, a teacher and department chair at a Flemington, New Jersey, high school, who is currently involved in writing standards for the social studies. He distinguishes his viewpoint on national standards from that of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and identifies future implementation problems and necessary resources. Finally, a commentary by retiring National Center for Effective Schools (NCES) Director Richard A. Rossmiller points to the importance of effective money management and equity for effective schools. (Contains 13 references.) (LMI)

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FOCUS IN CHANGE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS SUMMER 1993 NO.11

"National Standards: Who Benefits?"

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FOCUS IN CHANGE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS SUMMER 1993 NO.11

National Standards: Who Benefits?

To date, the debate over national standards for content and performance shows no signs of lessening, although it appears that national standards in a variety of content areas will soon be a reality. By 1994 educators will confront a plethora of separate and at times conflicting standards. At that point, they will have to decide what they will do about implementing and assessing these standards.

Why has this debate been so contentious? What implications do national standards raise for schooling? For equity? Will national standards — coupled with some scheme to assess whether or not students meet them — transform the face of American education?

We decided to devote this issue of FOCUS IN CHANGE to an exploration of these and other questions. As we began to research this issue, we discovered how even some of the people involved in setting the national standards remain skeptical about their worth. We learned how turf struggles in different content areas fractionate, rather than unite, educators supposedly desirous of the same outcome: improved student achievement. And we realized that serious problems may lie ahead when schools decide whether they will implement the standards now being written.

In fact, the implementation of all the separate standards efforts now underway raises the most pressing questions of all. For instance, how will the national standards effort succeed when history, geography, economics, and civics have set standards that are separate from those set by the National Council for the Social Studies? Will schools pick and choose from the standards that are available to them? If they do, how can such a fragmented effort be measured by a national assessment plan?

In addition, implementation of national standards is voluntary, not mandated. Schools do not have to change anything about the way they presently conduct instruction if they do not choose to. But will peer pressure dictate that schools comply?

That raises the question of who will benefit most from implementing national standards. Will well-financed, primarily suburban schools choose to demonstrate their success by electing to participate in some portion of the standards effort? How will national standards influence inner-city schools, where access to well-prepared teachers — or even fully certified teachers — may be far more difficult to obtain?

We sought answers to these questions from three individuals from different areas of education. We talk first with Linda Darling-Hammond, who co-directs the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University. Darling-Hammond, who is also a professor at Teachers College, is well-known for her research on teaching quality and educational equity. She points to other initiatives — apart from national standards — that she believes would improve the quality of teaching and learning much more substantively. In particular, she believes that until an equalization in school financing is achieved, implementation of standards efforts is almost meaningless. According to Darling-Hammond, the resource that most improves student achievement is access to well-prepared teachers, and she argues that we must devote resources to teacher recruitment and teacher education so that the pool of prepared teachers is increased.

We also hear from Deborah Meier, principal and co-founder of the Central Park East Schools in New York City. Meier, who is celebrated for her educational innovations, speaks highly of standards — as long as they remain flexible and open to continuous improvement and change. Opposed to the standardization of standards, she argues for the "habits of mind" as developed at Central Park East Secondary School, and draws from her own years in public education to illustrate her points.

Finally, we talk to one of the people currently involved in writing standards for the social studies. William Fernekes is a veteran teacher and department chair at Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington, New Jersey. Although active in the NCSS standards effort, he carefully separates his own viewpoint from the NCSS position on the national standards. In addition, he pinpoints difficulties in implementation that schools will face and the tremendous commitment of resources necessary for the standards effort to succeed.

Last, we conclude this issue with the final column by NCES director Richard A. Rossmiller. Professor Rossmiller retires this summer from his 43-year career in education. The NCES staff thanks him for his leadership, his support, and his thoughtful counsel over the past two years — and we wish him well in what we are sure will be a lively retirement. ♣

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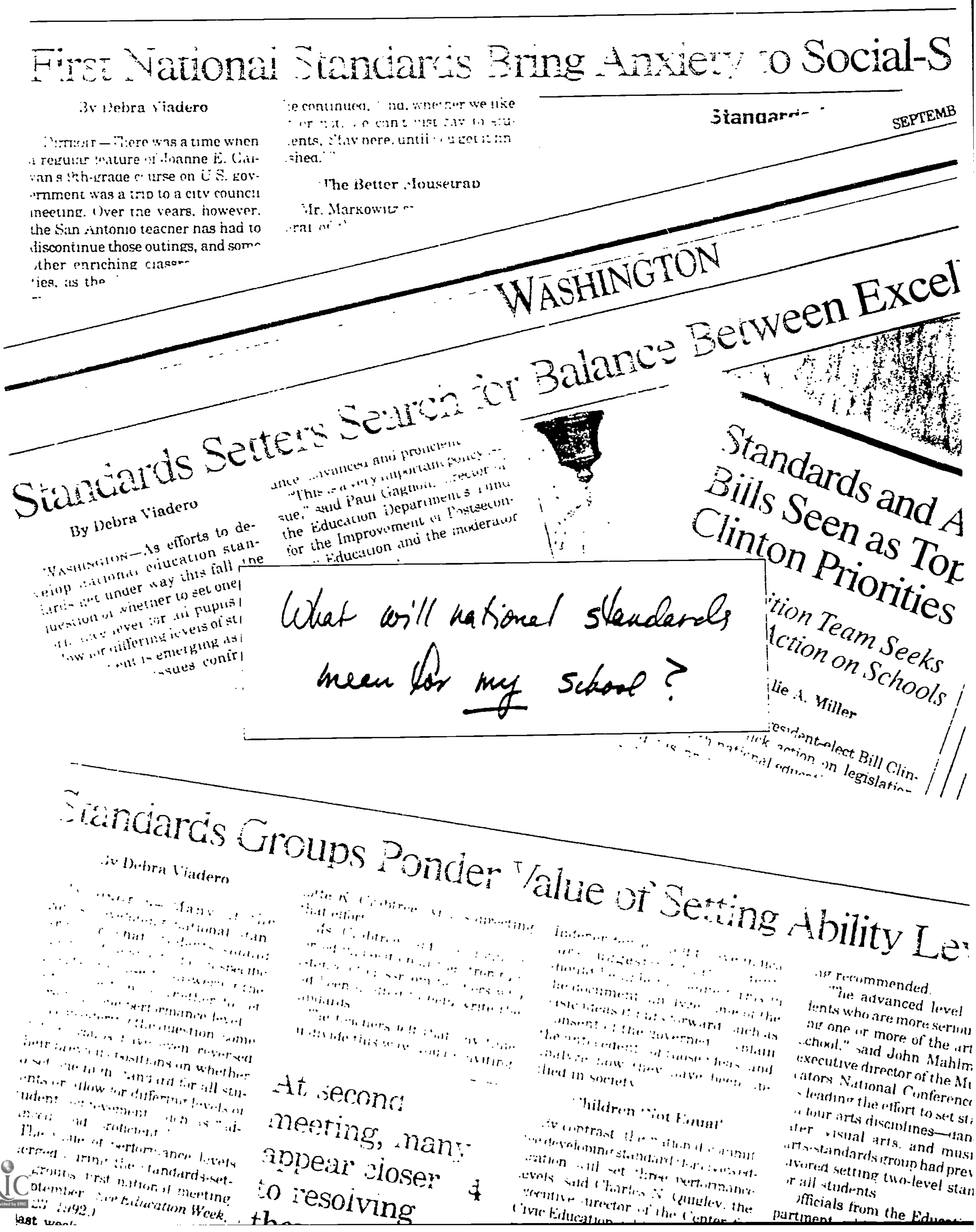

What will national standards mean for my school?

First National Standards Bring Anxiety to Social-S

By Debra Viadero

—There was a time when a regular feature of Joanne E. Garvan's 9th-grade course on U.S. government was a trip to a city council meeting. Over the years, however, the San Antonio teacher has had to discontinue those outings, and some other enriching classes, as the

he continued. "And, whether we like it or not, we can't just say to students, 'Stay here, until you get it finished.'"

The Better Mousetrap

Mr. Markowitz

Standards

SEPTEMB

WASHINGTON

Standards Setters Search for Balance Between Excel

By Debra Viadero

WASHINGTON—As efforts to develop national education standards get under way this fall, the question of whether to set one level for all pupils or allow for differing levels of st ... is emerging as ... issues confr

ance ... advanced and proficient ... "This is a very important policy issue," said Paul Gagnon, director of the Education Department's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and the moderator

Standards and A Bills Seen as Top Clinton Priorities

Transition Team Seeks Action on Schools

lie A. Miller

President-elect Bill Clinton ... quick action on legislation ... national educa

Standards Groups Ponder Value of Setting Ability Le

By Debra Viadero

... national stan ... performance level ... the question some ... their own positions on whether to set one high standard for all students or allow for differing levels of student achievement, such as "advanced" and "proficient." The issue of performance levels ... during the standards-setting groups' first national meeting September. (See Education Week, 1992.) ... last week

... that effort ... standards ... teachers will ... divide this way

At second meeting, many appear closer to resolving the

... the document ... ideas it puts forward, such as ... the governed ... and ... how they have been ... in society.

Children 'Not Equal'

By contrast, the National Council ... developing standards for ... education will set three performance levels, said Charles N. Quigley, the executive director of the Center for Civic Education

... recommended.

"The advanced level ... students who are more serious ... one or more of the arts ... school," said John Mahlmann, executive director of the Music Educators National Conference, ... leading the effort to set standards in four arts disciplines—dance, theater, visual arts, and music. The arts-standards group had previously favored setting two-level standards for all students.

Officials from the Education Department

INVESTING IN EQUITY

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

Why have national standards for content and performance come to occupy the prominent position they have on the national educational reform agenda? Who will benefit most from implementing national standards and an accompanying national assessment system? Are there implications for equity that should be addressed while the standards documents are being written — prior to their implementation? For instance, will holding students to one high standard impede or decrease the motivational level of gifted students? Will differential standards imply that schools have given up or abandoned lower-achieving students?

If national standards do not comprise a promising change agent for schools, what should be substituted? And how will national standards fit into already existing state-level standards? Ultimately, how will schools choose between existing and possibly contradictory standards documents — and if implementation of national standards is voluntary, will they make any measurable difference?

We opened up this issue of FOCUS IN CHANGE *to an examination of these and other questions within which any substantive discussion of national standards for content and performance is embedded. We begin with the views of Linda Darling-Hammond, who is Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Co-Director of the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching. Her work in educational policy research has focused particularly on issues of teaching quality and educational equity. She is editor of the* Review of Research in Education *and co-editor of* The New Handbook of Teacher Evaluation. *She has authored more than 100 journal articles, book chapters, and monographs on educational policy issues.*

TO Linda Darling-Hammond, the advent of national standards for content and performance will not be especially beneficial, nor will it succeed in changing the face of American education to any significant degree. "To the extent that any national-level standard-setting effort benefits anyone," she begins, "it will be through the articulation of standards for curriculum building and for teacher practice. Local districts can look at these and use them in ways that seem appropriate.

"But national content and performance standards — as they are now being discussed — are not going to lead us to higher quality education throughout the country. They are not going to lead to equitable allocation of school opportunities throughout the country."

Darling-Hammond points to the history of educational reform in the United States to buttress her argument, saying that every era has experienced its own reform effort, each with its own set of standards. These standards, she attests, have revealed glaring inequities in educational opportunities nationwide.

"We already know," she emphasizes, "in what schools, in what communities, and in what ways some students are performing less well than others, based on any kinds of standards you might name, including the existing standards expressed through a variety of standardized tests.

"The recognition of those inequalities, which has been going on for many decades, has not stimulated people to act to correct the resource disparities that continue them. I don't think the new performance standards are likely to convince people to correct resource disparities any more quickly than the old standards have done."

In her view, the key lies in formation of policies that directly address inequities in school funding. "If we want to get at the equalization of educational opportunities — which may lead ultimately to more equity of outcomes of education as well — we have to tackle the equity issue directly, which means equalizing school funding," she says.

In addition, access to highly qualified teachers must be equalized, she notes. "That is the most important resource for boosting student learning, and it is one of the most inequitably distributed resources. In order to increase access to well-prepared teachers, we have to expand the pool. One of the reasons that poor children are less likely to have well-prepared teachers is that there aren't enough to go around; we have to increase the supply of highly qualified teachers."

All of these ideas suggest a set of specific policy initiatives targeted toward strengthening the teaching force, she says, directly aimed at teacher recruitment, creating teaching incentives, strengthening teacher preparation programs, and ensuring that resources are equalized from district to district. She adds, "These initiatives ought to be pursued whether or not we have national content and performance standards for our students."

Can We Agree on Knowledge?

One contentious factor consistent to the national standards effort is lack of agreement on what should be taught. Is it possible to reach true national consensus on what students should learn?

Realistically, Darling-Hammond doesn't believe consensus is possible — and adds it might not be desirable. "I do think it is possible, however, to reach some consensus among members of the profession about how children learn well and what the implications of that are for practice," she suggests. "This consensus can be drawn from a growing knowledge base about teaching, about how children learn well and what the implications of that are for practice.

"But the questions of what children should learn are irresolvable in some sense, because knowledge is exploding at an ever-more rapid rate. Decisions about particular ways of construing that knowledge are always arbitrary, in some sense.

"And in another sense they are determined by the context within which people operate. What is important knowledge for someone who lives in one region of the country or in one kind of context may be differentially important for somebody who lives in another area of the country."

Advocates of national standards frequently argue that what is taught in one geographic region of the United States should be uniform throughout the country, and believe that differing contexts simply confuse curricular goals. For Darling-Hammond, these differences heighten her belief that there will never be exact answers about what students should learn.

"Obviously, this comes up the most prominently in social studies, where there are debates about which facts, which wars, which areas of the world students should study," she explains. "Given that there is so much to be known, there will never be an answer that reveals truth with a capital 'T' about exactly what students should know content-wise or in terms of particular social scientific facts."

But that does not mean that schools are helpless to improve themselves. "We can help address the ways in which we educate students in all fields — both within and across disciplines — so that we increasingly prepare students to inquire successfully into new areas of study, to learn how to access information so that they can analyze and synthesize information for themselves to generate new knowledge, so that as they have needs to continually educate themselves for the world that they will live in, they have the tools to do that."

She notes, "We would do ourselves a service to focus on how to help students learn to think and inquire and invent and create effectively rather than spending too much time fighting as though there will be some final answer about whether they need to learn this fact versus that fact and so on. The answers that people arrive at from district to district and from state to state that satisfy them are likely to be somewhat different."

Enacting Standards That Differ

Since standards-setters in different content areas such as history, geography, civics, economics, and social studies do not agree with one another about what should be taught and in what manner, what will districts and schools do with differing sets of national standards? Darling-Hammond replies, "The legislation that is currently on the table says that there is going to be a board that is going to certify national content standards, against which state curriculum and assessment programs are going to be certified by the federal government. Most of the states across the country are engaged in curriculum with programs that could be labeled as social studies. However, the national standards about to be certified have been designated in history and geography, but not in social studies. Also not in civics, yet the most commonly required course in the states across this country is civics or civics education. That's not legislated in the national content standards."

To Darling-Hammond, this is an obvious mistake that adds layers of complexity to an already complicated issue. "What about places that are trying to do interdisciplinary education, where they're teaching integrated humanities courses that include English, language arts and social studies? Or they're teaching mathematics and science in an interdisciplinary way? Does their curriculum essentially become de-certified or not worthy of support because it doesn't map onto the discipline-based national content standards? There are lots of tricky issues about starting from national content standards and mapping those down into the system, which haven't yet begun to be debated."

Another intricate issue that underpins any implementation of national standards is the existence of state standards in several states. How will these states integrate their standards with national standards?

"All of the states are engaged in trying to develop their own kind of new-age curriculum standards and new assessments," Darling-Hammond says. "There are common threads among many of those efforts; they are — in many cases — trying to envision and enact a more challenging interdisciplinary concept of curriculum, which is pointed more at helping students think creatively and critially rather than to memorize by rote and regurgitate information.

"There is a common thread of intenion across many states, but there are many, many diverse ways of going about it. This, of course, is also true in schools that are restructuring. People who are involved in their own locally developed school restructuring programs are all questioning what it is they want students to be able to do. They are asking what are the variety of ways that they can reconfigure themselves to provide those more intellectually challenging opportunities for more kids. We're also trying to provide that curriculum to a greater array of students, and we're trying to personalize it. National content standards may constrain those initiatives rather than support them."

One Standard for All?

If one standard is set for all students, might gifted students be held back?

Conversely, if more than one level of standard is set, does that imply giving up on lower-achieving students?

Darling-Hammond replies carefully, “Those are very good questions that fairly superficial talk about standards usually doesn't begin to address. There is a lot of value in thinking about offering a much more rigorous and challenging curriculum to virtually all students. That is, having more of a common set of goals for students than we have had in this country up until now.”

She points to tracking, saying, “We do a tremendous amount of tracking, starting in very early grades, which essentially amounts to curriculum rationing. We reserve certain kinds of curriculum that have been thought of as elite or privileged for only a small proportion of kids.”

As an example, she states that most students are tracked out of algebra and geometry courses by the end of middle school. “In other countries, everybody takes those courses and as a consequence everyone ends up achieving more relative to what would have been the case if they had been tracked into less demanding courses to begin with. We have a lot of research that shows that if you take two kids of equal achievement levels initially, and you put one in a challenging curriculum — a high-track course — and the other in a low-track course, the resulting difference in their achievement will be a function of the course they have been put into, not a function of their initial abilities.”

Although Darling-Hammond recognizes the merit in a set of common curriculum goals for all students, she contends that children have differing talents and differently developed intelligences. “Each student needs to develop those in his or her own individual ways. The student who is musically gifted ought to have the opportunity to pursue that to the greatest potential; the student who is gifted in mathematics who wants to go further should be encouraged.”

She continues thoughtfully, “I think it is possible to have a more common set of curriculum goals, to do less tracking initially and at the same time provide enrichment opportunities for all kids based on their differential talents and strengths and interests.”

> *“Turning a tool into a directive is a mistake. . .”*

She warns, “But we ought not just pick everyone to end up in exactly the same place on all dimensions of human performance. That would be denying our basic humanity, the fact that we are different individuals with different talents and interests.”

Holding Standards Up To Scrutiny

Is there any current plan to evaluate the standards themselves to see how credible or effective they are? Darling-Hammond points to the quality of the educational organizations from which many standards efforts have originated. “NCTM started the standards effort, and of course math is the easiest subject area within which to get consensus. The professional teaching organizations, however, do represent knowledgeable members of the profession well. They tend to be people who are well-versed in matters of how children learn and grow and develop and whether the curriculum decisions are appropriate for them. There are ways in the profession to bring together people and through a process of professional standard-setting, determine that the guidance that they're providing does map onto what we know about learning, about children, and about teaching.”

She continues, “A more problematic question is how you take fifteen political appointees, which is the kind of panel proposed in the current National Goals 2000 legislation, and give them the charge of making that judgment, when they do not represent the members of the profession who have spent their careers trying to acquire that kind of knowledge about children and teaching and learning.”

Will Standards Make a Difference?

If schools buy into the standards, will schools change to any significant degree? Darling-Hammond sees the standards documents as useful tools, but limited in terms of their ultimate utility or effect as change agents. “Having these kinds of documents from places like the national professional organizations,” she answers, “can be a useful tool for schools as they engage in rethinking their curriculum. But the most important thing for schools in terms of their capacity to improve instruction is to have knowledgeable teachers who are also supported for engaging in collegial inquiry about their practice. That is how you really get changes in practice.

“Professional organizations' efforts to provide guidance can be used well in schools if they are not mandated and if they are not used as constraints but rather as learning tools. That's where the legislative issue comes in. Turning a tool into a directive is a mistake. The most important thing for their proper use is having highly knowledgeable teachers, and what that really requires is that we begin to invest a great more attention in teacher and administrator education at the preservice level and in ongoing teacher development throughout the course of the career.”

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STANDARDS VS. STANDARDIZATION

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

What is the meaning and purpose of standards in education? What will happen when national standards are coupled with a national assessment system? If national standards will not improve what goes on in classrooms, what will? We decided to ask these and other questions of Deborah Meier, who is the principal and one of the founders of Central Park East Secondary School in New York City. A graduate of Antioch College, she holds a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago. Awarded a "Genius Grant" from the MacArthur Foundation in honor of her work in education, Meier writes frequently on educational issues. Her articles can be found in publications that include the American Educator *and* Dissent.

TO Deborah Meier, the continuing debate over national standards for content and performance is healthy — as long as the discussion revolves around what she considers its subject: the purpose of education. "The debate about the issue of standards continuously forces us to ask the purpose of education," she says. "That has been a missing discussion in this country."

This debate is something Meier welcomes. As she puts it, "Standards themselves — in a democratic society — always have to be open to debate, because they are fraught with biases, and I mean that in the healthiest sense. Such debate is what democratic life is all about and, in fact, sponsors."

However, she swiftly differentiates between standards and the standardization of standards — as when standardized tests are developed to assess to what degree students meet the new national standards. "When standards are attached to assessment, the debate is no longer a debate about standards, but about assessment."

She notes emphatically, "That is the wrong debate."

In fact, holding students accountable to nationally pre-determined standards ultimately to be assessed by some standardized measure, Meier says tartly, implies that our citizenry "needs some kind of civil service exam, only we're pretending it's academic."

And nationally ordained standards — whether or not compliance is voluntary — blunt the ideals that shine behind her concept of standards. "It's fine for professional educational organizations and other prestigious bodies to try to convince their publics that they have better standards, as long as we remember that standards should remain always open to debate."

National Standards as Gatekeepers

The ultimate power that fixed national standards — coupled with a national, standardized assessment scheme — may have over students' futures, however, she sees in dark, almost Orwellian terms. To Meier, a student's future opportunities could be truncated by not meeting prescriptive, academic national standards. "We are arguing that every American has to be well-educated, and has to spend a minimum of twelve years in school," she points out. "When I was young, a majority of Americans were not expected to graduate from high school. That's how new this idea is.

"The credential students receive at the end of their school experience weighs heavily in their life chances. That's an incredibly new and powerful burden we share as a society. Therefore, the question of what purpose that education serves needs enormous re-examination."

The process of debating what standards should comprise is moving much too rapidly toward standardized assessment for Meier to feel comfortable. "We're at the beginning of asking ourselves the question of the purpose of education. Just at the moment that we're opening the discussion, we want to close it. It's appalling that we're trying to close a discussion which should remain open."

Meier admits to some caveats about the kind of national standards as they exist to date — and points especially to the credentials of the people who are setting the standards. "Why should the academics decide what these twelve years are for?" she asks rhetorically. "The purpose of education is not to produce more academics. We may want graduates to go on to college, but we want them to become citizens and employees in a variety of vocations, only one of which is academia. And yet we have defined the standards only in an academic sense."

Although she describes herself as "a great admirer of academia," she maintains that academic standards should not become the "gatekeeper for all of life's vocations.

"And I mean all," she adds passionately, "because we're saying a hundred percent of our citizens should be capable of going on to college when they finish high school. We're defining college as strictly an academic enterprise, whose definition of quality will be determined only by the people who happen to be academics. And then we say that that's the only avenue through which you can become anything else."

Meier obviously disagrees with a definition of education that insists that college is solely a training ground for academicians. "What would it mean to have serious intellectual standards that were *not* set by academics?" she asks. "What are employers really dissatisfied with? I find it absurd to pretend that employers are dissatisfied because students don't know the dates of the

Civil War. It's clear that they are not finding some kind of rigorous work habits in youth — a sense of initiative, making judgments, and using evidence well. All of those things suggest a different kind of way of thinking about standards."

But she returns to her central concern. "Behind too much of our discussion of standards there is a notion that we have to measure so that we can compare a student in California to one in New Hampshire. Once we discuss standards in this context, then we immediately start worrying about standardizing something that we are at best arguing about."

National Standards vs. Habits of Mind

If national standards will result in use for comparative purposes, Meier doesn't want any part of them.

"Measuring and testing has been our primary vehicle for improving schools for fifty years," she says. "We're trying another gimmick now, but we're calling it standards. But we have been heading in the direction of national assessment since the 1940s and 1950s."

What will bring about significant change in teaching and learning, if national standards are not the appropriate tool? Meier warms to the question. "The school itself has to be an example of the kind of habits of mind and activity in which it wants students to engage. We learn by example. So, what would we like our young people to become? Is the life in school likely to lead them to be those kinds of adults? What do we know about learning theory and growth and development that would lead us to see what the connection has to be between the life of the school and the objective of the school?"

She continues, "What is it that prevents schools from being places where adults model the characteristics they desire young people to acquire? What is it that would encourage them to be that way? They won't be that way overnight because they're filled with adults who themselves were not educated in that way. And our schools are filled with children whose parents were not educated that way, and who have expectations that are not in keeping with what I think schools need to be."

She adds that such a dramatically different way of reinventing education will take time, but that alone does not alarm her. "It will take a generation or so," she says matter-of-factly. "We must ask: If I walk into a school will I see adults engaged in the kind of activities that model for the young what we want our young people to become? If we want our young people to become academic lecturers, then adults are engaged in that, although they're not even very good academic lecturers.

"I don't think that's what we want our young people to be, but I don't know why we spend so much time putting them in situations where they don't see adults engaging in what we want them to be able to do."

She lists the ways in which schools do not model what they want young people to become. "They don't see adults investigating things. They don't see adults engaged in discussion. They don't see adults carrying on interesting conversations. They don't even see older students doing work that's more sophisticated than the work they're doing. What is it that young people see around them that represents to them the life to which we want them to aspire? And where would they see people doing it more expertly?"

She illustrates what she means with an example. "If I'm going to teach a kid tennis, the first thing I want to make sure is that he has seen tennis played well. And then I want to engage him in a tennis game, with more opportunities to practice tennis, and more opportunities to practice it with people who are slightly better than he is.

"In education, we're engaged in trying to get young people to join a club worth joining. But we have to define that club, and the discussion of standards should be a discussion of what we imagine the standards for membership in that club to be."

Standards at Central Park East

Meier practices what she preaches: at the schools that have evolved through her leadership, what she terms "habits of mind" have been collegially developed by school staff. "We selected five habits of mind that we felt we wanted young people to use. We wanted to be sure that we ourselves were in the habit of using them. We wanted to use these habits of mind not only around the subject matter they studied in class, but around anything that came up in the life of the schools. We tried to define these five habits of mind as ones that would make sense in the science classroom, the history classroom, the lunch room, in a debate about whether the kids had behaved appropriately, in their job placement, and so on."

Although the staff agreed on five habits of mind, Meier points out there could have been ten just as easily. "The five are: How do you know what you know? Can you think of another way of looking at the same thing? Can you see connections between that and other things? Can you imagine it being very different from that? And finally: So what? Who cares? What difference does it make?"

Work habits are equally important, she emphasizes. "We expect that students will show that they can initiate activities, that they can meet deadlines, that they can revise their work, that they can reflect to see how they might have done it differently."

How do the habits of mind fit into state-required curriculum? Meier responds, "We took those state requirements and we asked the important question: Within issues of math and history, do our students show that they have these habits of work and habits of mind? In order to achieve that, we cannot cover as much American history as the normal syllabus assumes. Therefore we are not particularly concerned with how much American history they have studied, but we are concerned with whatever issues they have tackled in American history, that they have done so in a way that responds to these habits of work and habits of mind."

Was the process of developing the habits of mind and work a difficult one? "It's difficult," Meier acknowledges, "because we keep reinterpreting them. Every time we revisit one of those habits we see new things, new possibilities, other meanings. We realize that the kids interpret them differently than we had in mind, and we add their interpretations to them. Every time we look at a student's work, we have to ask: What is the evidence that this student does or does not have these habits of mind? The student has to be brought into it too, and she may argue with you. Some other person may have another point of view. In the process of the discussion we change each other's minds all the time."

To illustrate how standards can vary tremendously person to person, Meier points out: "Is there a movie that everyone agrees is a great movie? Is there a book that everybody loves? Even when we say there's a book that everyone loves, to some extent it's because everybody has been intimidated. There are a lot of great pieces of literature that some people don't like at all. That's the nature of the human condition, that there will always be disagreement about such standards. Since I want students to believe in their power of persuasion, I believe it's enormously helpful never to fix our standards absolutely."

So that the habits of mind and work can be assessed, students present their work to a graduation committee composed of school staff. "The graduation committee has a scoring system, but none of us pretend that there's not a lot of judgment — and therefore human error — involved. Students can appeal the committee's decision to another body. Of course, that body also operates with human judgment. Normally we don't think that's a weakness, but a strength, because students are required to discuss, persuade, defend, argue, and show evidence for their contentions."

> *"Does our school at least do no harm?"*

Does Meier have any recommendations that other schools can use to change their own ways of evaluating students? "They should begin," she replies, "by asking themselves how they would know a well-educated person. What qualities do they look for in their fellow staff? What are the qualities that please them? What is it we honor in other human beings? Are these reflected in the school's graduation standards?"

She adds with some poignancy, "Does our school at least do no harm? In addition, does it in fact organize to encourage and contribute to these qualities we admire? When we start asking those kinds of questions about standards, we will come up with things like our habits of mind and habits of work."

Will a national assessment system, coupled with a national curriculum, be enacted in American schools? Meier says wryly, "I'm a terrible, terrible prognostician. But I learned through initiatives I worked with in the late 1960s and early 1970s that we killed some efforts in our eagerness to prove to the public that they worked. For instance, this was true the last time around when we tried to improve math standards.

"In the late 1950s and early 1960s we knew we were not doing a good enough job with math education. We got involved in a very promising new thinking about math. While people now laugh at what was called new math at the time, it is essentially the same thing as what NCTM has come out with. We lost thirty years. We probably lost them because we rushed to put out textbooks with the new math in them, and we changed all the tests, and none of the teachers knew what they were doing. People like myself were told, 'We have to beat the Russians. We can't afford your slow method of changing the way teachers think before you change the way they teach.'"

Somewhat ruefully, Meier acknowledges her own standards may be utopian, yet she maintains that she prefers them to those set by national committees. "I have high expectations. One is that people should be able to sustain and enjoy uncertainty, be able to hold two conflicting ideas in their head at one moment and be aware of the fact that they're in conflict with each other and not rush to conclusions. Or they should imagine what kind of evidence would be needed to change their minds."

"You could meet every one of the equally utopian standards put forth today by standards committees and still not be able to meet *my* standards. People think you can change your mind because if someone says, 'If you don't change your mind you'll be in trouble.' You can't change your mind unless you actually change your mind."

"Educators in the schools tend to feel imposed upon by mandates from outside — rightly or wrongly."

RAISING THE BAR

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

Will national standards change what actually occurs in classrooms? Since implementing standards is voluntary, will schools and districts want to or be able to participate? What will they need in order to do so effectively? How will national standards mesh with existing state-level standards and other curriculum initiatives? Will national standards in social studies compete with national standards in history, geography, civics, and economics? What sort of teacher training and other efforts will be necessary to effect full-scale implementation?

To gain a sense of the teacher's perspective — as well as the perspective of an individual who has been involved in the national standards effort — we asked these questions of William Fernekes, who is on the Task Force created by the National Council for the Social Studies to draft standards for the social studies. Fernekes, who holds an Ed.D. in Social Studies and Curriculum Theory from Rutgers University, is Supervisor of Social Studies at Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington, New Jersey. A veteran teacher, he has been a social studies supervisor for the past six years; for nineteen years he has been a social studies and foreign language teacher.

Bill Fernekes has a straightforward, pleasant manner that he couples with an incisive, deeply reasoned analysis of many of the key issues that envelop the debate around national standards. In his comments, he clarifies the role of national standards in the educational reform movement, pinpointing the obstacles to implementation that schools and districts face.

Why are national standards at the top of the reform agenda? What accounts for their prominence? Fernekes believes that two reasons underpin their position — but is careful to separate his personal viewpoint from the rationale he offers. "The business community and local leaders feel that national standards will help to raise economic issues — economic competitiveness issues — to the forefront of the educational agenda in this country," he says. "By raising standards — making the bar higher on the high jump, you might say — they believe that the schools will be forced to create a better work force."

He adds, "I personally feel that this is an inadequate justification for national standards. But I believe it is the basic justification underlying the National Goals Panel, America 2000, and other federal-level initiatives."

Fernekes also believes there is a current movement of considerable power directed toward a national curriculum. "There is concern among certain educational reformers that we have too much inconsistency from one state to another, from one school district to another, from one part of the country to another, from one student population to another. They feel that establishing greater consistency of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation will lead to improvement in educational achievement."

He pauses, and then notes, "I do not believe that, personally, but I think there are well-intentioned people who do believe that."

What Does "Voluntary" Mean?

Although the standards movement encompasses the entire country, it is a national, not federal, effort. As such, participation on the part of schools and districts is voluntary. What does voluntary mean, and how successful can it be?

Fernekes points to the nature of governance in the U.S. in his reply. "We have a relatively unique situation in the United States, because there is a tripartite division of governance. There is a local level, which can mean municipal or county. There is the state level, and then the federal level. My observations of educational policy over the last five to ten years lead me to the conclusion that the federal government is taking an increasingly important role in trying to manage educational policy that will impact on the state and local level."

He continues, "There is a lot of resistance to that, not only because of tradition, but because of legitimate concerns that the federal role will be overbearing and create a greater problem than we have at the current time."

To understand why national standards are national and not federal — or voluntary and not mandated — Fernekes looks to the governors who framed the six national goals as key players in the voluntary versus mandatory framework within which the standards will operate. "The governors legitimately want to see improvement in educational achievement, but I think they want to allow enough flexibility to allow their own states to buy into this effort or not. They see the peer pressure of many states getting on the bandwagon as bringing all of them in line, but at the same time, they want to have the autonomy to make the decision at the state level."

Therefore, rather than mandate national standards, he believes the governors prefer to see the voluntary standards succeed through both a top-down and bottom-up approach, such as was advocated by the National Council on Education Standards and Testing.

Will schools participate in the national standards effort? Will it be easier for wealthy or adequately financed schools to participate, while poor, inner-city schools simply struggle to survive? What will it take for schools and districts to willingly engage in such a massive curriculum and instructional effort?

Fernekes considers his answer. "I don't think we find the same situation in every state," he replies. "I'll use New Jersey as an example. New Jersey has tremendous disparities in socioeconomic levels. We have one of the highest per pupil expenditures in the country. Yet that is not uniform. And the State Supreme Court struck down our funding formula as unconstitutional."

He explains the progression in New Jersey from a radically different funding formula, written by the current governor, that was enacted, resisted, and subsequently modified. "Just last year there was another school funding law put in place that was a modification of the first revision, which has now created a bi-partisan effort to come forward with a new program, to try to compromise between the radical revision and what the critics of the property tax structure saw as just the continuation of the past.

"I think you're seeing that pattern all around the country. Texas, for example, faces that problem. Kentucky has faced that problem. The inequities in funding are driving the constitutional challenges to funding, and then there is the demand that there be a revision of how schools are funded."

Funding inequities around the country underscore his belief that equalization of resources must occur before any reform initiative will have much impact. "There has to be equalization of resources to establish a foundation that will provide a minimum basic that will allow the school district to operate in a way that would try to realize these standards."

But he identifies another critical problem. "Independent of that, there is a culture of schooling that is independent of — and not closely related to — what happens in state educational bureaucracies. I do not believe the reform effort has effectively tackled how you engender an innovation in school cultures. The basic idea is that educators in the schools tend to feel imposed upon by mandates from outside — rightly or wrongly."

Personally, Fernekes believes there are occasions that warrant mandates. "I think sometimes we need to have mandates from outside. For instance, we have made tremendous gains with the disabled and with other special education areas. Had not the federal government addressed that, I think we would still be twenty-five or thirty years behind where we are now.

"But in this case, where we are working to set standards, schools are not at the same starting point. Secondly, many educators disagree about the substance of these things. And the other point, which probably is underlying the whole thing, is that they don't know much about it."

As an example, he discusses the standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which are frequently held up as a model of standard-setting. "NCTM not only garnered a tremendous amount of money to develop the standards, but did it in a way that was intelligent, by saying they were going to take their time with the effort, develop the standards, and then work through their professional organization to spread the word. I think there has been some resistance, but there has been a lot of progress in having people understand what they are. In our school, the department chair and the faculty are accepting of them, and they're moving forward and trying to implement them. But this hasn't happened through a top-down mandate. It has occurred through professional organizations and through publicity of those standards, done in a broad-based way. My feeling is that's the best way to go."

His next comment is tinged with the pragmatism of one who is a veteran teacher. "You're still going to get people who are going to reject things, too. We still have a long way to go in education to make our schools more cooperative and collaborative, and to make thoughtful, professional judgments about policy issues."

An Equal Opportunity to Learn?

If the same standards are applied to all kids from all backgrounds in all schools — whether or not they are well-financed — how will equity issues be safeguarded?

Fernekes says, "I don't think writing the standards is as difficult as delivering them. Number one, delivering standards means equity in resource distribution. Number two, there must be a massive retraining effort for educators and the public, too. Also, the public has to understand that they have to invest in this, and I don't think they are ready to do that."

He relates the story of a meeting he attended in January 1993 in New York City, at which representatives of national professional organizations involved in standards efforts were present. "Fran Haley, who had just indicated she was leaving the National Council for the Social Studies as executive director, made a comment that was very revealing. She said that by her count — and it was confirmed by others there — there were thirteen standards projects underway at the same time developing curriculum standards in this country. She said, can you imagine the fourth grade teacher who is going to get all of these, have to deal with them, and hasn't had a course in about seven or eight of these fields in twenty years?"

Fernekes echoes her concern, adding, "It is an incredible burden to place on teachers, and it is also unrealistic to expect them to learn all the new things they need to know about history, geography, economics, math, science, English — a whole host of things."

Somewhere between the writing of standards and the ultimate delivery of standards lies a chasm, Fernekes maintains. "The people who are developing all of these are going to say, here they are; here are all the volumes. It's a total lack of understanding about school culture."

Choosing Between Standards

If a teacher is presented with multiple sets of conflicting and contradictory standards, how will she choose between them or try to combine them?

In his reply, Fernekes distinguishes between the position of the National Council for the Social Studies and his own personal viewpoint. 'The position of NCSS, which I think is valid, is that we're not competing with others. What we're trying to do is recognize that social studies is a comprehensive field. It is not a field divided into small territories and empires. Our position on the Standards Task Force is that you cannot have an effective social studies education without addressing the range of subject matter areas that constitute the field. So we have avoided using the labels of history and geography, and have taken major concepts like time, space, place, continuity and change, power, governance, and authority, which are important in specific disciplines like political science, geography, history, or economics.

"But we feel you've got to allow autonomy so that local districts and states can meet the standards we've written in their own ways. The history standards, the geography standards, and the civic standards are going to be far more content-heavy and prescriptive in a very specific way. The jury is out as to how this is going to be received."

Although the social studies standards differ from the others, Ferneke does not believe they are incompatible. "You can draw many things from history or geography or civics, and now economics has started their own standards initiative, which will easily be compatible with what we're doing.

"We're saying that we want meaningful social studies standards, and so we have to look at the whole range of the broad field. We feel the ones we have written have to be addressed through the different grade levels."

What has it been like to serve on the NCSS panel that has been writing standards for the social studies? How are disagreements resolved? How has an overarching philosophy emerged? Fernekes reports that everyone on the panel came to the initial meeting with their own ideas. "We hashed out a lot of definitional issues, a lot of priorities. When a conflict arose, sometimes we would put it aside because there was no resolution. Later we would revisit it."

> *"The jury is out as to how this is going to be received."*

The process, he reports, was cordial. "Nobody ever got rancorous. We would try to come to an understanding of what the problem was, and then address not only the theoretical but the practical concerns. We would go back to literature-based or research-based concerns, based on the material we had received."

He says that most of the conflicts were resolved by "collective rational deliberation" — although not all conflicts have been resolved to date. He emphasizes, "Nobody said, 'Here is the template; you must do this.'"

At this point, the NCSS standards are in the second draft, soon to be completed. Next the document will be sent to over 700 reviewers around the country, including administrators, classroom teachers, a panel of social studies experts drawn from universities and other groups, and an outside review panel.

He concludes, "The document is very broad-based. We're very pleased with that because we felt that it had to be extremely democratic and get as widespread a review as possible."

Although the NCSS position is that the social studies standards are compatible with the history, geography, civics, and economics standards, Fernekes believes that a political agenda has dominated the other standards. "My personal opinion is that the battle is over territory and turf. History has a lot of money and was heavily funded under the Bush administration. Geography and civics have gotten money because they're all linked into the definition of the National Goals. Social studies was ignored deliberately and left out of the discussions during the Reagan and Bush administrations."

He adds, "The point is that social studies has been the field for 75 years, yet there are people who believe that shouldn't be the case. There is an ideological battle going on, and the people who dominated educational policy under the Reagan and Bush administrations would like to see social studies abolished."

How Will Classrooms Change?

With the advent of national standards, how will classrooms differ? Will curriculum and instruction really change, or will the movement for national standards fade and pass away like other reform initiatives that have not made a lasting difference in education?

Fernekes points to three factors necessary for the standards to make an impact. "One, there has to be a commitment to examining our strengths and our areas for improvement. In New Jersey and in other states there are already other standards initiatives underway, as well as existing curriculum mandates. We have to put all these on the table. If we're going to say that the standards are the capstone of this, and they're going to guide development and refinement of our work, we have to establish a coherent way to relate them.

"Then people have to look at where they need to move in order to realize these. Let's say a person says, 'I haven't been in graduate school in ten years, and I might really have to take a refresher course in some areas.'

"Last, districts have to decide that the standards are important enough to put money, time, and effort into them. I'm not convinced that there is going to be much change in pedagogy unless there is a consistent and well-funded effort to take this to the public and tell them that if they want to enhance cooperation and effective development of critical thinking skills then we have to spend time, effort, and money to help people get trained in this. We're not going to have a quick fix."

He adds sardonically, "Anyone who thinks by the year 2000 we're going to have improved test scores should have his or her head examined, because nothing is going to change effectively unless this is a coherent effort at all grade levels. By the way, that includes higher education, because there has to be a real rethinking of teacher education. The kids who want to become teachers have to see more models than somebody being expository for an hour and a half."

Fernekes is convinced that nothing less than fairly radical rethinking coupled with action throughout the educational system will make a difference. "There will be change if districts and teachers understand the standards and we take good examples of practice to guide them."

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CLARIFICATION...

The youth pictured on pp. 2 and 5 of the Spring 1993 issue of FOCUS IN CHANGE was not intended to portray a gang member. NCES regrets any difficulties this may have caused.

COMMENTARY

RICHARD A. ROSSMILLER

IT is with mixed emotions that I pen this final column as Director of the National Center for Effective Schools. While I look forward to the opportunity to pursue new interests and to devote more time to old interests that retirement will provide, I shall miss the excitement of day-to-day involvement in educational research and development. Forty-three years have gone by very quickly and while in any given year one sees little progress or even some slippage, in retrospect much has been accomplished since 1950. For example, we now educate nearly all handicapped children in regular school programs, school district consolidation has changed the nature of our educational organizations, African American children no longer attend separate schools, and we know much more about effective schools and effective teaching than we did in 1950. However, much more remains to be done if all children are to share equally in the benefits gained from receiving a quality education.

For the past 32 years I have been deeply interested in the economics and financing of education, particularly in the linkages between money, the resources that money buys, and student learning outcomes. I am constantly amazed by the folklore that passes for knowledge in this area and by the naiveté of professional educators concerning these linkages. About the only statement on which a majority of specialists in educational finance agree is that spending the same amount of money on each child does not represent equity in educational finance because children have differing needs, skills, motivations, and aspirations. They require differing educational programs if they are to achieve their full potential, and this will require different levels of expenditure and differing types of resource configurations. Precisely what variations will be most effective, however, is still the subject of heated debate.

The results of research over the past 60 years concerning the linkage between expenditure levels and student learning can be summarized succinctly: Money is necessary, but not sufficient! Money is important only because it is needed to purchase resources. Simply spending more money, however, is no guarantee of improved student performance. It is the specific resources that are purchased and the wisdom with which resources are used that determines whether student performance is enhanced. Class size provides a good example. Reducing class size in a school or school district is an expensive option. Whether or not it will improve student learning outcomes depends on whether teachers take advantage of the opportunities that smaller classes present. If they continue to use the same instructional strategies and procedures that they used with larger classes, there is no reason to expect improved student performance.

> *". . . in retrospect much has been accomplished since 1950."*

Conspicuously absent from the characteristics of effective schools is high levels of spending. The early research on effective schools focused on schools whose students were doing much better than one would expect given the resources available to them. While resources are necessary, the way they are managed is what makes the difference between effective and ineffective schools. This relationship goes far toward explaining why effective schools are characterized by strong leadership from the principal. Effective principals are skilled in managing both human and material resources in ways that enhance student learning and achievement.

The current movement toward the adoption of national standards has very important implications for equity in access to resources, as the articles in this issue illustrate. How can teachers or schools be held accountable for the success or failure of their students in attaining the national standards if educational opportunities are not allocated equitably both within states and between states? Linda Darling-Hammond states the case eloquently and makes the case that "we have to tackle the equity question directly."

Equity is easy to espouse but hard to practice. Most Americans are in favor of equity so long as it requires no personal sacrifice but their enthusiasm for equity wanes rapidly if it means giving up what they perceive to be advantages for their own children so that other children can have access to the same kinds of opportunities. Much work remains to be done if we are to provide equal educational opportunities for all children and the discussion of national standards has not yet come to grips with this problem. Unless it is addressed, national standards, no matter how well-intentioned, will lead to more frustration and disillusionment.

N·C·E·S

The National Center for Effective Schools, housed within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is a not-for-profit, grant-funded organization whose mission is to help schools provide a quality education to all students. To achieve this goal, its programs are threefold.

First, through its professional development program, *School-Based Instructional Leadership (SBIL)*, Center staff work to empower school leaders to implement and sustain a continuous process of school improvement. The program is administered to teams of central office staff, building-level administrators, teachers, support staff, and parent/community representatives.

Second, the Center's innovative program of computer software, *Management Information System for Effective Schools (MISES)* enables teachers and administrators to use a personal computer to access information to produce student lists or reports, monitor students' progress and scores, and create a database integrated with a selection of analytical tools so that information on learning and student progress is available at the school or classroom level.

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PUBLICATIONS

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National Standards

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