DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 542 EA 031 241

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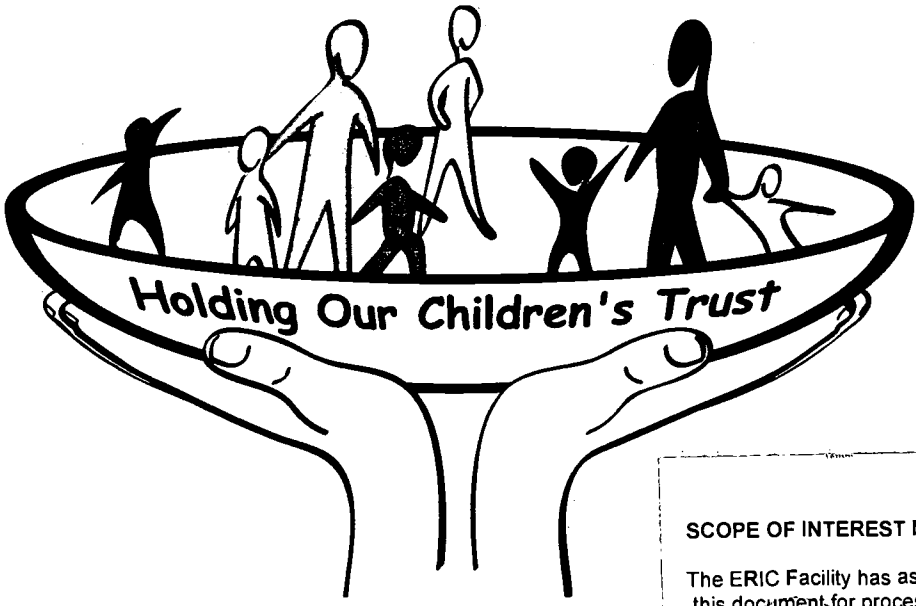
TITLE Building on What We Have Learned: A National Dialogue on Standards-Based Education.
INSTITUTION North Central Regional Educational Lab., Oak Brook, IL.; Berkana Inst., Provo, UT.; Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, Aurora, CO.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 2001-03-00
NOTE 28p.; Version 1. The most recent version located online at the National Dialogue Web site.
CONTRACT ED-01-CO-0011; ED-01-CO-0006
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.nationaldialogue.org.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Standardized Tests
IDENTIFIERS Berkana Institute; Mid Continent Research for Education and Learning; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

ABSTRACT

Three nonprofit organizations support a dialogue on standards-based educational reform. North Central Regional Education Laboratory, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, and the Berkana Institute offer Web sites and a toll-free number to those who want to comment on this type of reform. In surveys, a clear majority of parents feel that testing to identify students who need help and to publish school's scores for comparison are appropriate uses of standards tests. However, even more parents are against using the score on one test as the criterion for promotion to the next grade or for graduation. In high-stakes assessment, teacher's jobs and students' promotion are at risk. Teachers have to be apprised of the contents of the tests given in order to even attempt to teach to the test. Another major concern is equity. African American, Hispanic, and Native American students tend to perform at lower academic levels than whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders on most standardized measures of achievement. High-stakes testing policies may increase education inequity between whites and minorities or between affluent and impoverished students, perhaps increasing dropout rates. Possibly standards scores will prod schools to target resources where they are needed most. Potential topics to address, suggested questions, and recommendations from research literature are offered, along with a glossary and suggested reading. An appendix traces the history of this type of reform from 1983. (RJK)

Building on What We Have Learned

A National Dialogue on Standards-Based Education



by Susan Biemesderfer

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North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

McREL
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BERKANA
The Berkana Institute

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Version 1*

March 2001

*This document also exists in an electronic format. The most recent version is located online at the National Dialogue Web site (www.nationaldialogue.org) and contains links to the articles and research studies referenced.

For more information about the National Dialogue on Standards-Based Education, visit the National Dialogue Web site at www.nationaldialogue.org.

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This work was produced in whole or in part with funds from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, under contract numbers ED-01-CO-0011 and ED-01-CO-0006. The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI or the Department of Education, nor does mention or visual representation of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the federal government.

Foreword

Here's what we believe: A tremendous amount of energy in this country is being focused on whether or not standards-based educational reform has made an impact in the manner in which it was intended—namely, helping all students achieve to high levels.

This issue has deep roots and often polarizes communities, but it also has spurred some unique and promising partnerships. One such partnership has grown among NCREL, McREL, and the Berkana Institute—three not-for-profit organizations dedicated to quality public education for all of our children.

Our organizations have committed to starting and supporting real dialogue about standards-based educational reform among people with diverse and often dissenting voices. Our hope is that together we will recognize common ground and begin to generate action steps and measurable outcomes that significantly improve opportunities to learn for all children. We hope that these dialogues—planned at national, state, and local levels—will create and sustain momentum for change.

As one product of our growing relationship around this reform effort, this monograph is intended to provide information to help you explore both sides of the standards issue. It is by no means a comprehensive report; rather it's a very traditional means to tweak your interest, encourage you to raise important questions, and inspire you to let your voice be heard.

The National Dialogue sessions, while thoughtfully and deliberately planned, will be structured in a way that many participants may not find familiar, traditional, or even comfortable. Purposefully, these conversations will compel you to reflect on your beliefs about public education and the role that standards play within this system. You will be challenged to look deeply at the consequences of this reform effort—both the intentional and unintentional impacts on children, classrooms, and schools.

We are certain that this conversation will grow from community to community, because at its heart is the welfare of our children's future. We also believe that these conversations have the potential to shift our thinking and reactions away from blame and apathy toward positive action that will make a real difference for children.

We look forward to meeting each of you.

Gina Burkhardt, Executive Director
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Tim Waters, Executive Director
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

Myron Kellner-Rogers, Cofounder
The Berkana Institute

Contents

Why This Dialogue? Our Purpose, Plan, and Partners

Overview

During the past two decades, the quality of public education in America has been the focus of unprecedented study, debate, and legislative activity nationwide. The impetus for much of this activity was the "rising tide of mediocrity" cited in *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5). As a result, educators, parents, and policymakers have devoted much time, discussion, and hard work to improving educational opportunities for children.

Today, in the wake of concerns about education that echoed throughout the 1980s—and reforms proposed and implemented throughout the 1990s—most of us involved with public schools are navigating our way through a variety of changes in policies, expectations, and everyday practices. In particular, the use of standards has been advocated to ensure that all students reach high levels of learning.

Subject-matter experts nationwide have identified achievement standards in subject areas ranging from English, mathematics, and science, to dance, theater, and art. Those standards, in turn, have served as a foundation for new classroom curricula—as well as assessment and accountability systems—in districts and states across the country. (For a complete timeline and history, see Appendix A, *The Road to Standards: A Brief History of Standards-Based Educational Reform.*) Educators who are implementing standards in the classroom have experienced both the joys and the frustrations of standards-based education (see Mid-continent Research on Education and Learning, 2000).

Standards-based reform initiatives have met with both success and controversy. On one hand, significant increases in student achievement have been linked to standards-based efforts. For example, a recent RAND report (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000) concluded that considerable increases in math test scores in certain states could best be explained by an "integrated set of policies involving standards, assessment and accountability." A University of Texas study (Johnson & Asera, 1999) also tracked similar progress in nine high-performing, high-poverty urban elementary schools.

On the other hand, standards-based educational reform initiatives have been the subject of ongoing debate. Criticisms about reform efforts have ranged from practical considerations (for example, teachers have been overwhelmed by the sheer number of standards) to concerns about socioeconomic factors and how they play into growing achievement gaps. Indeed, the parents, educators, researchers, and policymakers involved with reform initiatives often have found themselves at odds with peers, neighbors, public leaders, and other community members.

The term *education reform* has evolved from a well-intentioned concept to a politically charged catchphrase. Many standards-based assessment and accountability systems have come under fire, particularly when the stakes are high—for example, when students may be held back a year or denied a diploma based on test results. In February 2000, nearly 200 students in Chicago organized a "flunk-in" to protest the state's standards-based test. In March 2000, a group of high school students in Massachusetts boycotted a statewide assessment. And in

December 2000, the California State Board of Education, fearing legal challenges to the state's new high school exit exam, voted to request urgent legislation delaying the date that the test becomes mandatory for students (see Shafer, 2000).

Given this backdrop—where a movement that arose from concern for children often has been mired in division, polarization, and politicization—the challenge is clear: to raise the quality and productivity of public discourse on education reform. To facilitate this discourse, the National Dialogue on Standards-Based Education has been created.

The Plan

The first meeting to launch the National Dialogue is scheduled for April 19-21, 2001, at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri. The project and the April session have been planned and designed by an Advisory Team that includes representatives from parent organizations, student groups, educational organizations, state departments of education, business communities, policy organizations, the U.S. Department of Education, and research and development organizations. (Appendix B provides a complete list of Advisory Team members and their affiliations.)

We expect that the April meeting will be the first of a series of regional and national opportunities for dialogue. These events will be unique. Unlike most conferences, where experts typically present information to attendees, the focus of these gatherings will be on the participants. The meetings will provide a setting for a variety of stakeholders—including educators, parents, students, researchers, and policymakers—to share common experiences, success stories, and frustrations. Using a few simple and clear "ground rules for dialogue," participants will determine the direction and focus of their conversations.

In addition, we anticipate that some participants might decide to sponsor similar dialogue events within their own states, constituencies, and local communities. For example, a local group might decide to host its own "town meeting" to share some of the insights and information gleaned from a National Dialogue event.

Digital Strategy

Our dialogues will be supported and advanced by a comprehensive digital strategy. Our Web site, www.nationaldialogue.org, will provide easy, ongoing access to information about upcoming events, as well as an electronic library of research and media reports about standards-based educational reform efforts. The information will present a balanced perspective, without bias toward one school of thought or another. In addition, the site will enable visitors to share information with other participants and to take part in live, online dialogues.

Through this digital strategy, the National Dialogue will have a presence that reaches far beyond the launch event. It will be an ongoing, evolving electronic venue for exchanging ideas, concerns, success stories, information, and resources. Online dialogue participants also will have the opportunity to receive e-mail alerts about upcoming online events, including panel discussions and discussions with guest experts.

How to Participate

If you would like to participate in the National Dialogue on Standards-Based Education, please contact us online through our Web site at www.nationaldialogue.org or through e-mail at dialogueinfo@mcrel.org.

You also may call our toll-free number, 1-877-846-2332. We will provide regular updates on National Dialogue events and activities.

Our Partners

Initial partners include the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), and the Berkana Institute. In addition, the Boston-based public television station WGBH will be documenting certain aspects of the dialogue process. As the dialogue progresses, we anticipate that our group of partners and sponsors will grow.

- **NCREL** is a nonprofit organization that provides research-based expertise, technology resources, technical assistance, and professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and policymakers throughout the Midwest. Based in Naperville, Illinois, and supported by the U.S. Department of Education, NCREL serves a seven-state region, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The NCREL Web site is located at www.ncrel.org.
- **McREL** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving education through applied research and development. Based in Aurora, Colorado, and supported by the U.S. Department of Education, McREL's regional educational laboratory provides technical assistance, professional development, and other research-based services to state and local education agencies in Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The McREL Web site is located at www.mcrel.org.
- **The Berkana Institute** is a 501-C3 charitable educational and research foundation based in Provo, Utah. The Institute's staff, led by founders Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers, seeks to create communities of support and inquiry to explore new thinking and practice about the organizing of human endeavor. The Berkana Institute Web site is located at www.berkana.org.

Moving the Dialogue Forward

Framework for Progress: More on Dialogue

We are building a partnership to do the work we believe most needs to be done in this arena: creating the right conditions for stakeholders to discuss standards-based educational reform, high-stakes testing, and accountability. Our approach is rooted in the value of bringing together people with diverse points of view for thoughtful conversation about a critical topic.

In this context, we use the word *dialogue* quite deliberately. Dialogue is, by definition, an activity that requires a suspension of judgment and, more important, a shared pursuit of understanding and insights. In fact, the Latin roots of the word emphasize a focus on process and meaning: *dia* translates as "through"; *logos* translates as "word" or "meaning."

We are setting the stage for this dialogue so that the information and solutions that already exist within our participants' experiences and expertise will be shared. As Margaret Wheatley (1999, p. 9) points out in *Bringing Schools Back to Life: Schools as Living Systems:*

> Living systems contain their own solutions. When they are suffering in any way—from divisive relationships, from lack of information, from declining performance—the solution is always to bring the system together so that it can learn more about itself from itself. Somewhere in the system there are people who have already figured out how to resolve this problem. They are already practicing what others think is impossible. Or they possess information which, if known more widely, would help many others.

From a foundation of shared understanding and insights, we can move forward to make real progress. We hope this process may lead to the kind of thoughtful focus described by Jonathan Kozol (2000, p. vii) in his foreword to the book *Will Standards Save Public Education?* (Meier, 2000):

> In speaking of "the aims of education" for a city or a nation, even for a neighborhood, we draw to some degree on who we are, and what we like (or don't) in ourselves, and what we wish we might have been.
>
> So when I listen to debates on education—whether about standards, pedagogic styles, or objectives, or "assessments," or whatever else—I listen first to voices. Before I pay attention to ideas, I want to gain some sense of character and value—lived experience—within the person who is telling us what he or she believes is best for children.
>
> .... So the question, for me, isn't if we ought to have some "standards" in our children's education. It is, rather, how and where they are determined, and by whom, and how they're introduced, and how we treat or penalize (or threaten, or abuse) the child or teacher who won't swallow them.
>
> .... So the question, again, is not if we "need" standards in our schools but with what sensibilities we navigate between the two extremes of regimented learning with destructive overtones, on one side, and pedagogic aimlessness and fatuous romanticism on the other .... There is a place of sanity where education is intense and substantive, and realistically competitive in a competitive society, but still respectful of the infinite variety of valued learnings and the limitless varieties of wisdom in the hearts of those who come to us as students.

Ground Rules for Dialogue

Experts in the field of dialogue—among them, authors Peter Senge (1990) and David Bohm (1996)—provide us with a simple set of ground rules for our dialogue. These rules are:

- All participants suspend their assumptions.
- All participants regard each other as colleagues.
- The facilitator holds the context.

In addition, Seng (1990) and Bohm (1996) provide several general characteristics of dialogue that may be helpful to understand before participating in the dialogue process. They include the following distinctions between dialogue and discussion:

In dialogue...	In discussion...
There is an emphasis on listening.	There is an emphasis on talking.
Opinions are shared without intention.	Opinions are shared with the intent to influence or persuade.
There is freedom for each person to talk.	There is competition for airtime.
Conversation is group-facilitated.	Conversation is leader-dependent.
There is a free flow of ideas.	Ideas are shared according to agendas and goals.
Participants suspend their assumptions.	Participants defend their assumptions.
Consensus tends to emerge from broad-based understanding.	Consensus tends to be limited to myopic opinion.

Our expectation is that through true dialogue, participants will be able reach beyond any differences and disagreements toward a better understanding of how to improve education for all of our children. In this context, our participants' diversity of opinions, experiences, and backgrounds will serve only to strengthen our collective effort.

More Context for the Dialogue on Standards, High-Stakes Testing, and Accountability

The Big Picture

To date, 49 states have adopted state education standards. As a report by the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization Public Agenda (2000b) explains: "Although strategies vary from state to state, they often include clarifying teaching and curriculum guidelines, tying promotion or graduation to specific skills, eliminating promotion based on age, and testing students periodically to ensure progress." Overall, classroom practices in many schools have changed and, in school districts across the nation, rigorous assessment and accountability systems have been or are being put into place.

In addition, by some accounts, a certain backlash has developed in reaction to standards-based reforms. An article by Chmelski (1999) in the National School Boards Association *School Board News* summarizes the phenomenon this way:

> In some schools, teachers have complained about having to push aside real learning to concentrate on drilling for the tests. Some parents fear their students will be penalized if they don't pass. Academics have claimed that critical thinking skills are being neglected. Some urban school leaders argue their schools are not treated equitably and that the tougher tests are causing more students to drop out. And many have become frustrated by the high failure rates and by how long it takes to see real progress.

Despite such concerns, public opinion surveys continue to reflect support for the key principles underlying standards-based

reforms. Results of a national parent survey by Public Agenda (2000a) show that 71 percent of parents questioned support testing during elementary years as a way to identify struggling students; 75 percent agree that "students pay more attention and study harder if they know they must pass a test to get promoted or to graduate"; and 76 percent agree that "requiring schools to publicize their standardized test scores is a wake-up call and a good way to hold schools accountable." However, almost eight in ten parents interviewed (78 percent) also agree that "it's wrong to use the results of just one test to decide whether a student gets promoted or graduates."

In light of the challenging mix of responses to standards-based reform, former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley (2000) described the education reform movement as being at "a critical juncture" in his annual State of American Education address:

> We have worked very hard in the last decade to help states and school districts set new expectations and put new high standards into place for all of our children. This has involved committed and dedicated educators from all of our nation's public, private, and parochial schools. But setting new expectations and reaching for high standards have to be done the right way....
>
> We are at a critical juncture in raising standards. As standards move from the statehouse to the schoolhouse, the debate is growing louder. While some of the debate reflects opposition to higher standards and stronger accountability, much of it is occurring because there is a gap between what we know we should be doing and what we are doing.

What This Means for Teaching and Learning

Most concerned observers, regardless of their opinions about standards-based education, agree that the crux of a meaningful dialogue on the topic should focus primarily on what happens in classrooms. In a U.S. Department of Education brochure for parents, Stolp (n.d.) gives this explanation of possible reform-based changes:

> How reforms will affect your child will depend on the type of changes that are made. If reform is related to the subject areas, your child may be introduced to new content, materials, and ways of learning. These changes may be made as a result of a particular education goal or objective. If the reform is related to the administrative process, your child may not notice any change at all. Such changes may affect only administrative decision-making or the school-community relationship.

When it comes to teaching and learning, the basic components of standards-based educational reform present a certain paradox of conventional and innovative approaches. This paradox is described in the following passage by Hill and Crevola (1999) in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Yearbook:

> Standards-based education is both very familiar and very new. It is familiar in the sense that countless initiatives throughout the history of public schooling have focused on standards as a means of improving student learning outcomes. It is also familiar in the sense that most of the elements that make up standards-based education are well known to teachers and

school administrators. They can be found to varying degrees in almost all schools and school systems.

What is new about standards-based education is (1) the degree of focus and commitment to the goal of ensuring that all students achieve defined and challenging standards of performance, (2) the coherence and depth of the beliefs and understandings that underpin the response, and (3) the rigor and sophistication with which every aspect of schools and school systems is examined, redesigned, and managed to ensure that high standards are achieved.

Accountability and High-Stakes Testing

As is sometimes the case with new educational approaches, the vision and theory behind standards-based efforts have not always been well reflected in what actually happens in schools. Although most states have adopted statewide content standards and have begun to develop assessments based on those standards, the systems of accountability that states have put into place have not always been closely aligned with their standards. Yet students, teachers, and administrators face potential rewards and sanctions based on these accountability systems.

A recent report by Stapleman (2000) for Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning explains the disparity that exists in some instances:

> As accountability measures are put in place, schools, districts, and states play varying roles and have different responsibilities, depending on the way each system has been structured. Each of the 50 states has taken a different approach to holding schools accountable.
>
> States rarely set out to create a new accountability system from whole cloth. A report from the Education Commission of the States (1999) noted that components often fall into place in fits and starts, rather than in the logical sequence of developing standards and aligned assessments first. States may implement some components by law and others by regulation. Often components of state systems are not aligned because they were implemented years apart and for different purposes.

Much of the public protest about standards-based educational reform has focused on the high stakes for students, teachers, and schools. More than half the nation's states use standards-based tests to rate all schools or to identify low-performing schools. Test results often are used to determine if a student may be promoted to the next grade or graduate from high school. And an increasing number of states are using assessments to hold teachers accountable for the test results of their students (Lewis, 2000).

An article by Domenech (2000) in *The School Administrator* describes the issues raised by testing based on the state of Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL):

> Today, the state's SOLs face serious challenges from educators and parents concerned with the eventual impact the tests might have on children and education. The problem is with the high-stakes assessment program that is supposed to measure whether or not the standards are being met.

> It was not enough to simply raise the bar and expect our children to perform at higher levels. Along with the higher standards came accountability. Our policymakers were determined to hold students and educators accountable for their performance or lack thereof. Enter high-stakes testing.
>
> ... It is the question of validity, or how these high-stakes tests are being used and interpreted, that threatens to undermine the whole standards movement.

In addition, although a common criticism of standards-based reforms is that teachers under accountability pressures resort to "teaching to the test," just the opposite is sometimes the case. Classroom practices do not consistently reflect state-mandated assessments. For example, a recent report by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (cited in Boser, 2000) shows a limited relationship between what teachers are teaching and what state assessments are testing. In the ten states studied, the extent of overlap (between items taught and items tested) ranged from 46 percent (in fourth-grade science in one state) to just 5 percent (in eighth-grade math in another state). These findings, say experts, touch on another issue that is key to better aligning standards-based systems: adequate training and professional development for teachers to help ensure they are aware of the standards addressed by state tests.

There also is disagreement about how heavily test sores should weigh on students, teachers, and schools. Even in states where test results are generally high, experts and education officials are cautious about attaching too much significance to assessments. For instance, Archer (2000) notes that in Connecticut—where students post top scores nationwide on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in fourth-grade reading and mathematics—the state board of education recently approved the following statement:

> There is a danger that overemphasizing state test scores to evaluate a student's, a school's, or a district's performance can result in an inappropriate narrowing of the curriculum and inappropriate classroom instructional practices.

The Opportunity to Learn: Equity Issues

In this context of high stakes, issues of fairness and equity arise. Although there are well-documented examples of notable student improvement linked to standards-based reforms, assessments, and accountability systems—in high-poverty, urban schools (see Johnson & Asera, 1999) as well as suburban and more affluent schools—there also are well-documented, continuing disparities in achievement that correlate along race and class lines.

As a recent report by Taylor (2000) for the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory points out, "Research consistently confirms that beginning in early elementary school and persisting across the academic career, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students tend to perform at lower academic levels than whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders on most standardized measures of achievement (e.g., NAEP and SAT test scores)" (p. 5). The report continues:

> The literature suggests several contributors to this gap. Some [researchers] argue that deep, structural barriers within society (such as racial

> prejudice and discrimination) prevent certain racial/ethnic groups from achieving at high levels. Others contend that cultural attributes within groups either match (or mismatch) with the norms and expectations of schooling and, therefore, support or thwart student achievement. Still others suggest that school characteristics, including the curriculum, instruction, resources, and teacher expectations, contribute to the gap. (p. 6)

Critics of standards-based testing argue that decisions that will have a major impact on a student should not be made on the basis of a single test score. (See Berkowitz, Wolkowitz, Fitch, & Kopriva [2000] for guidelines for educators and policymakers with regard to high-stakes tests and compliance with nondiscrimination laws.) Moreover, some say, when districts and states place great emphasis on standardized tests, pre-existing gaps in achievement—linked by many studies to race and socioeconomic status—are likely to grow only deeper. As Jencks and Phillips (1998) note, "Reducing the test score gap is probably both necessary and sufficient for substantially reducing racial inequality in educational attainment and earnings" (p. 4). In the January 2000 issue of the *Harvard University Gazette*, an article titled "Studies: 'High Stakes Tests Are Counterproductive" reviewed the results of two studies commissioned by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard. The article stated, "So-called 'high-stakes' testing policies that require students to pass standardized tests deepen educational inequity between whites and minorities and widen the educational gap between affluent and impoverished students ...."

Similarly, a recent *Education Week* article by Johnston and Viadero (2000) reinforces this notion that gaps in achievement and opportunity are likely to be compounded by schools' heavy reliance on testing:

> By 2019, when they are 24 years old, current trends indicate that the white children who are now nearing the end of their first year in school will be twice as likely as their African-American classmates, and three times as likely as Hispanics, to have a college degree.
>
> The disparity in school performance tied to race and ethnicity, known as the achievement gap, shows up in grades, test scores, course selection, and college completion. It happens in cities and suburbs and in rural school districts. The gaps are so pronounced that in 1996, several national tests found African-American and Hispanic 12th graders scoring at roughly the same levels in reading and math as white 8th graders.
>
> After decades of school desegregation efforts, during which the gap between blacks and whites closed substantially, progress has stalled. At the same time, the greater diversity of the school population and the rapid growth of the Hispanic population and other ethnic groups have reshaped the problem with a more complex set of issues.
>
> Those factors, combined with a much stronger focus on test scores in K-12 education ... have raised the achievement-gap issue to the forefront of the national debate about schools, and created a new sense that something needs to be done.

In an effort to close race- and poverty-related gaps in test scores, coalitions of educators, community leaders, parents, and researchers

are working to address potential underlying issues. For example, the Minority Student Achievement Network is a national partnership of 15 multiracial, urban or suburban school districts from across the country working to improve the academic achievement of students of color, specifically African-American and Latino students. In a recent report, the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement (1999) noted the "chronic shortage of African-American, Latino, and Native American students who achieve at very high levels academically." This report describes several research-based strategies for raising student achievement, including: providing all students with high-level and engaging curricula; delivering exemplary instructional support to teachers; providing support to students to increase their opportunities to learn at high levels; engaging parents in meaningful classroom participation and in school decision-making; recruiting and retaining exemplary teachers (especially in poor schools); and promoting fair and responsible accountability.

In addition, some observers argue that, ultimately, standards-based reforms will help to safeguard equal access to high-quality education. A recent commentary by William L. Taylor (2000), vice chairman of the Leadership Conference of Civil Rights, offers the following perspective:

> Today, new forms of accountability and assessment are the best tools we have to ensure quality education for all children. When schools and districts are held accountable for the achievement of all students, the means are at hand to force them to improve the quality of schooling provided for previously neglected students. Standards and accountability expose the sham that passes for education in many heavily minority schools and provide measurements and pressure to prod schools to target resources where they are needed most.

Questions and Recommendations

Questions to Address Regarding Standards, High-Stakes Testing, and Accountability

The potential topics to address in this dialogue are numerous and varied. The following list of questions, compiled by the National Dialogue's Advisory Team, is offered as a starting point for further dialogue.

- What are some of the education reform success stories that ought to be publicized and shared? What can we learn from those successes? What do these students, teachers, and/or schools have in common?
- How can we make standards a better "fit" for our kids and schools? How can we better align classroom, school, and district practices with the intent of standards?
- How can we do a better job of using standards to help kids learn at high levels? In other words, how can instructional practices be used to engage students in the kind of learning addressed by standards?
- How do we truly support the learning of *all* children? What are some practical approaches to improving levels of equity and fairness when it comes to all children's opportunity to learn?

- What else can we do to address achievement and opportunity gaps?
- How should accountability be delineated? Who ought to be accountable for what?
- When it comes to assessments, how high-stakes should tests be? How effective are sanctions? How do sanctions affect children? How do sanctions impact teachers?
- What is the most constructive role for incentives?

Recommendations from the Literature

Experts often have disagreed about how to address concerns about teaching and learning in the context of standards-based assessments and accountability. With so many different issues potentially coming into play, proposed solutions may pose difficulty in building consensus and even be more challenging to put into place. In that context, the following recommendations are among those that frequently have been offered by researchers and practitioners to states and districts attempting to improve their standards-based systems (see Goodwin, 2000; Olson, 1999; Riley, 2000; Thomas, 2000; Tripp & Platt, 2000):

- **Align standards and assessments.** Work with teachers and administrators to better align state and local content standards with student assessments. This kind of consistency and coherency is essential to fair and accurate testing of students' progress.
- **Clearly identify the range of subject matter that a test will measure.** If the range is comprehensive, make that clear: Teachers then have a better sense of the assessment, as well as motivation to teach a broad range of information and context.
- **Report on performance regularly.** Establish a consistent, accessible method of reporting school performance (such as school report cards) to parents, educators, policymakers, and the public.
- **Establish clear consequences.** Clearly define and communicate the potential remedies and sanctions for low-performing students, teachers, and schools, and the potential recognition and rewards for high-performing students, teachers, and schools.
- **Help teachers improve curricula.** Ensure that the curricula are rigorous. Studies of achievement gaps have found that minority students tend to be concentrated in low-performing schools where less rigorous curricula are used.
- **Help teachers improve instruction.** Build the capacity of teachers to teach in ways that are compatible with the state standards. Provide ongoing technical assistance and professional development, which are vital to improving instruction and maintaining high-quality instruction standards.
- **Provide leadership.** Encourage the implementation of fair and workable standards-based reforms. Properly fund initiatives and maintain systems of accountability. Such leadership is a critical factor in producing sustainable, improved student achievement. This recommendation is essential across classrooms, schools, districts, and states—from teachers and principals to superintendents, school boards, and state houses.

- **Provide assistance.** Provide ongoing technical assistance, financial backing, and other resources to struggling schools. Ensure that state and district levels have not only the capacity but also the willingness to provide such assistance.

In addition, researchers such as Honey, Culp, and Spielvogel (1999) are beginning to address the many ways that technology can be used to improve student achievement—both directly (as a tutor, a means to explore, a creative tool, and/or a communications tool) and indirectly (by providing resources to support teachers in improving instruction, developing high-quality standards, and accessing tools for professional development).

Breaking It Down: Definitions for Dialogue

The following definitions are offered as points of reference for National Dialogue participants.

Academic or Content Standards: Statements that provide a clear description of the knowledge and skills that students should be developing through instruction in specific content (or academic) areas.

Assessment: A method used to determine what a student knows, has learned, and/or is able to do.

Benchmark: Level of performance that is expected in a given subject, in a given grade. A benchmark is usually a set measurement point used to assess whether students are progressing toward a specific goal.

High-Stakes Testing: Achievement tests (or assessments) that may carry serious consequences for students (e.g., being held back a grade or denied a diploma based on low scores) or for educators (e.g., sanctions for low scores or financial rewards for high scores).

Performance-Based Assessment: An evaluation in which students demonstrate they know something by using knowledge and facts. Practical applications and real-life tasks are used. (Sometimes referred to as Authentic Assessment.)

Performance Standards: Statements that describe what it will take for a student to demonstrate mastery of a standard. (Sometimes called benchmarks.)

Rubric: A scoring guide that gives specific criteria on which a piece of student work will be evaluated based on standards for student performance.

Standard: Generally speaking, a description of what students should know and be able to do.

Standards-Based Accountability: Policies, procedures, and systems designed to hold students, teachers, and schools responsible for their performance with regard to academic standards. Standards-based accountability systems use various measures and are implemented at various levels (school-level, districtwide, statewide).

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Appendix A

The Road to Standards: A Brief History of Standards-Based Educational Reform

The following section is an excerpt from Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education, *by John S. Kendall and Robert J. Marzano. This document is a product of the Standards Project at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). For access to the entire document and a complete list of references, go to* http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/docs/purpose.asp.

Many educators see the publication of the now-famous report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) as the initiating event of the modern standards movement. Few calls to action have been so often quoted as the dire pronouncements from that report: "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. . . . We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5).

Amid growing concerns about the educational preparation of the nation's youth, President Bush and the nation's governors called an Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, in September 1989. That summit concluded with the establishment of six broad goals for education that were to be reached by the year 2000. The goals and their rationale are published under the title *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners* (National Education Goals Panel [NEGP], 1991). Two of the goals (3 and 4) related specifically to academic achievement:

> Goal 3: By the year 2000, American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
>
> Goal 4: By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

The goals were outlined in the State of the Union of 1990, a year which also saw Congress establish the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP); the following year, Congress established the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST). Collectively, these two groups were charged with addressing unprecedented questions regarding American education such as, What is the subject matter to be addressed? What types of assessments should be used? What standards of performance should be set?

These efforts had an impact on national subject-matter organizations, who sought to establish standards in their respective areas. Many of these groups looked for guidance from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), which preempted the public mandate for standards by publishing the *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* in 1989. The National Academy of Sciences used the apparent success of the NCTM standards as the

impetus for urging Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander to underwrite national standards-setting efforts in other content areas. According to Diane Ravitch, then an assistant secretary of education, "Alexander bankrolled the projects out of his office's discretionary budget" (in Diegmueller, 1995, p. 5). The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) quickly launched independent attempts to identify standards in science.

Efforts soon followed in the fields of civics, dance, theater, music, art, English language arts, history, and social studies, to name a few. (An overview of the movement to establish standards in the core subject areas is reported in Table 1.1.) Since 1990 the movement has acquired considerable momentum at the state level as well. As of 1999, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and every state except Iowa have set or are setting common academic standards for students (American Federation of Teachers, 1999).

Table 1.1

1983	*A Nation at Risk* is published, calling for reform of the U.S. education system.
1983	Bill Honig, elected state superintendent of California public schools, begins a decade-long revision of the state public school system, developing content standards and curriculum frameworks.
1987	The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) writing teams begin to review curriculum documents and draft standards for curriculum and evaluation.
1989	Charlottesville, VA: The nation's 50 governors and President Bush adopt National Education Goals for the year 2000. One goal names five school subjects—English, mathematics, science, history, and geography—for which challenging national achievement standards should be established.
1989	The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics publishes *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics.*
1989	Project 2061 of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) publishes *Science for All Americans,* describing what "understandings and habits of mind are essential for all citizens in a scientifically literate society."
1990	In his State of the Union address, President Bush announces the National Education Goals for the year 2000; shortly thereafter, he and Congress establish a National Education Goals Panel (NEGP).
1990	The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) is appointed by the Secretary of Labor to determine the skills young people need to succeed in the world of work.
1990	The New Standards Project, a joint project of the National Center on Education and the Economy and the Learning Research and Development Center, is formed to create a system of standards for student performance in a number of areas.

1990, Fall	Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) begins the systematic collection, review, and analysis of noteworthy national and state curriculum documents in all subject areas.
1991	SCANS produces *What Work Requires of Schools,* which describes the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the workplace.
1991, June	Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander asks Congress to establish the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST). The purpose of NCEST is to provide a vehicle for reaching bipartisan consensus on national standards and testing.
1992, Jan.	NCEST releases its report, *Raising Standards for American Education,* to Congress, proposing an oversight board, the National Education Standards and Assessment Council (NESAC), to certify content and performance standards as well as "criteria" for assessments.
1992, Jan.	The National Council for the Social Studies names a task force to develop curriculum standards.
1992, Spring	The National History Standards Project receives funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education.
1992, Spring	The National Association for Sport and Physical Education begins work on Outcomes for Quality Physical Education Programs, which will form the basis of standards in Physical Education.
1992, June	The Consortium of National Arts Education receives funding from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities to write standards in the arts.
1992, July	The Center for Civic Education receives funds from the U.S. Department of Education and the Pew Charitable Trusts for standards development in civics and government.
1992, July	The Geography Standards Education Project creates the first draft of geography standards.
1992, Oct.	The Committee for National Health Education Standards is funded by the American Cancer Society.
1992, Nov.	The Bush administration awards funds to create English standards to a consortium of three organizations: the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Reading Association, and the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois.
1993, Jan.	The National Standards in Foreign Language Project becomes the seventh and final group to receive federal funds for standards development.
1993, April	McREL publishes its first technical report on standards, *The Systematic Identification and Articulation of Content Standards and Benchmarks: An Illustration Using Mathematics.*
1993	AAAS's Project 2061 publishes *Benchmarks for Science Literacy.*

1993, Nov.	NEGP's Technical Planning Group issues *Promises to Keep: Creating High Standards for American Students,* referred to as the "Malcolm Report." The report calls for the development of a National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC), which would give voluntary national standards a stamp of approval.
1993, Nov.	The National Research Council, with major funding from the U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation, establishes the National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment (NCSESA) to oversee standards development in content, teaching, and assessment.
1994, Jan.	McREL publishes *The Systematic Identification and Articulation of Content Standards and Benchmarks: Update, January 1994,* which provides a synthesis of standards for science, mathematics, history, geography, communication and information processing, and life skills.
1994, Feb.	The Standards Project for English Language Arts, a collaborative effort of the Center for the Study of Reading, the International Reading Association, and the National Council of Teachers of English, publishes the draft *Incomplete Work of the Task Forces of the Standards Project for English Language Arts.*
1994, March	President Clinton signs into law Goals 2000: Educate America Act. This legislation creates the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) to certify national and state content and performance standards, opportunity-to-learn standards, and state assessments; adds two new goals to the national education goals; and brings to nine the number of areas for which students should demonstrate "competency over challenging subject matter." The subject areas now covered include foreign languages, the arts, economics, and civics and government.
1994, March	The U.S. Department of Education notifies the Standards Project for the English Language Arts that it will not continue funding for the project, citing a lack of progress.
1994, March	The Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, publishes the arts standards (dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts).
1994, Fall	The National Council on Social Studies publishes *Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies: Expectations for Excellence.*
1994, Oct.	Lynne Cheney, past chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), criticizes the U.S. history standards in the *Wall Street Journal* two weeks before their release. (NEH, with the U.S. Department of Education, funded development of the U.S. history standards.)
1994, Oct.	U.S. history standards are released; world history and K-4 history are released shortly thereafter.
1994, Oct.	The Geography Education Standards Project publishes *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards.*

1994, Nov.	The Center for Civic Education, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the Pew Charitable Trusts, publishes standards for civics and government education.
1995, Jan.	Gary Nash, National History Standards Project co-director, agrees to revise the history standards; the U.S. Senate denounces the history standards in a 99-1 vote.
1995, April	The U.S. Department of Education withdraws assurance of a $500,000 grant to the *National Council on Economic Education for the development of standards in economics.*
1995, May	The Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards releases *National Health Education Standards: Achieving Health Literacy.*
1995, Summer	The National Association for Sport and Physical Education publishes *Moving Into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education.*
1995, Oct.	The National Council on Economic Education, using funds from private sources, convenes a drafting committee to develop standards; projected publication is winter 1996.
1995, Nov.	The New Standards Project releases a three-volume "consultation draft" entitled *Performance Standards* for English language arts, mathematics, science, and "applied learning."
1995, Dec.	McREL publishes *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education,* a synthesis of standards in all subject areas, including behavioral studies and life skills.
1995	The National Business Education Association publishes *National Standards for Business Education: What America's Students Should Know and Be Able to Do in Business.*
1996, Jan.	The National Standards in *Foreign Language Education Project publishes Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century.*
1996, Jan.	The National Research Council publishes *National Science Education Standards.*
1996, March	The National Education Summit is held. Forty state governors and more than 45 business leaders convene. They support efforts to set clear academic standards in the core subject areas at the state and local levels. Business leaders pledge to consider the existence of state standards when locating facilities.
1996, March	The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association publish *Standards for the English Language Arts.*
1996, April	Revised history standards are published. A review in the *Wall Street Journal* by Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger, professor emeritus at City University of New York, endorses the standards. Lynne Cheney renews her criticism of the history standards, determining that the revision does not go far enough.

1996	The International Technology Education Association, supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, releases a guiding document for the development of standards in technology.
1997, Feb.	President Clinton, in his State of the Union address, calls for every state to adopt high national standards, and declares that "by 1999, every state should test every 4th grader in reading and every 8th grader in math to make sure these standards are met."
1997	EconomicsAmerica releases *Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics* in paper copy and on CD-ROM.
1997	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages publishes *ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students.*
1997	The National Center on Education and the Economy publishes the New Standards' *Performance Standards: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Applied Learning*—one volume each for elementary, middle, and high school.
1998	The National Communication Association publishes *Competent Communicators: K-12 Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy Standards and Competency Statements.*
1998	The Council for Basic Education publishes *Standards for Excellence in Education,* which includes standards in science, history, geography, English language arts, mathematics, civics, foreign language, and the arts
1998	The American Library Association publishes *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning,* which includes nine broadly described information literacy standards.
1999, Fall	The National Education Summit is held. Governors, educators, and business leaders identify three key challenges facing U.S. schools—improving educator quality, helping all students reach high standards, and strengthening accountability—and agree to specify how each of their states would address these challenges.
1999	The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project republishes their standards as *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*, complemented by nine language-specific standards for Chinese, classical languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.
2000	The International Technology Association publishes *Standards for Technological Literacy: Content for the Study of Technology.*
2000	The International Society for Technology in Education publishes *National Educational Technology Standards for Students: Connecting Curriculum and Technology.*

Appendix B

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