



GOVERNORS  
EDUCATION  
SYMPOSIUM

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A REPORT FROM THE 2008  
GOVERNORS EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM

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**June 8-10, 2008**  
Cary, North Carolina



*Working at the intersection of policy and politics*

## INTRODUCTION

Convened by the James B. Hunt Jr., Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy and the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices, the **2008 Governors Education Symposium** took place over three days in June in Cary, North Carolina. Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, former chair of the NGA, and former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt served as co-chairs of the **Symposium**.

The **Symposium** took place at a time of heightened awareness that the present and future global economy puts higher demands on American students and their schools – demands for broader and deeper analytical skills required to succeed in high-skill occupations. However, results from the most recent Programme in International Student Assessment (PISA) show that, since 2003, the performance of American students declined somewhat in reading, math, and science, and that the United States scored below the average of the 30 nations that participate.<sup>1</sup> This gap between demand and performance raises concern about the future health of state economies and the nation as a whole.

The **Symposium** focused intently on raising educational standards in our nation's schools; elevating the quality of teachers and school leaders; leveraging postsecondary institutions to meet shifting workforce needs; and refocusing finance systems to align more directly with student achievement goals. Governors, former governors, and an array of researchers and policy experts engaged in lively, in-depth discussions about specific education challenges facing states.

The experts convened for the **Symposium** are listed below. As they contributed to the discussions with governors, they drew from the body of existing research, their own research, and policymaking experiences. This report reflects the discussions that occurred and highlights major themes from the **Symposium**.

*The following resource experts and current and former governors participated in the discussions:*

### **RESOURCE EXPERTS**

Sir Michael Barber, McKinsey & Company  
Erskine Bowles, The University of North Carolina  
Anthony Carnevale, Global Institute on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University  
Tim Daly, The New Teacher Project  
Sandy Kress, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld  
Arthur Levine, Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation  
Goodwin Liu, School of Law, University of California, Berkeley  
Lorraine McDonnell, University of California, Santa Barbara  
Matt Miller, Center for American Progress  
Ellen Moir, New Teacher Center, University of California, Santa Cruz  
Michael Petrilli, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation  
Andreas Schleicher, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)  
William Schmidt, Michigan State University  
Vivien Stewart, Asia Society  
Jerry Sue Thornton, Cuyahoga Community College, Ohio

### **CURRENT GOVERNORS**

Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano  
Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe  
Guam Governor Felix Camacho  
Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius  
Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley  
Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm  
Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, National Governors Association Chair  
Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer  
North Carolina Governor Mike Easley  
Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen  
Virginia Governor Tim Kaine  
West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin  
Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle

### **FORMER GOVERNORS**

Jim Hunt, James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy  
Roy Romer, Strong American Schools  
Bob Wise, Alliance for Excellent Education

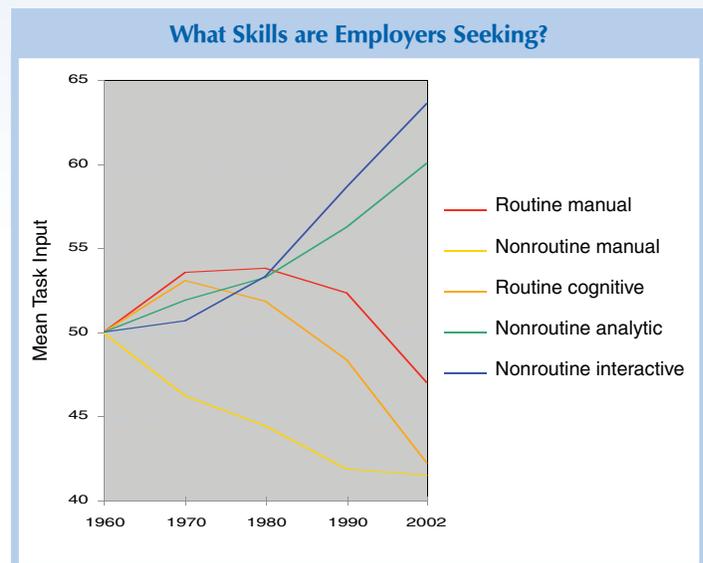
## OTHER COUNTRIES MEETING THE DEMAND FOR ADVANCED SKILLS

One of the critical issues for governors is the impact of the global economy on state economies and the nation as a whole. More than ever, it is imperative that education in the United States prepare all students with the knowledge and skills needed for success in work and life. The low-skill workforce within the U.S. has downsized considerably, with most jobs now requiring some postsecondary education. The skill demand is shifting with a trend away from rote, manual jobs and toward jobs requiring problem-solving and analytical skills. Routine cognitive jobs – jobs that can be easily described to others – are declining. Workers that can apply their knowledge creatively to analyze and solve problems are in greater demand, and this demand will increase as the future unfolds.<sup>2</sup>

Current international comparisons of academic achievement indicate the United States has not made significant educational progress during the last 30 years, and other countries, such as China and Singapore, have made measurable gains, specifically in the number of adults who possess postsecondary credentials – a critical indicator of success in the global economy.<sup>3</sup>

Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that, in both the attainment of high school diplomas and college degrees, the United States has not fallen behind, but competitor nations have made swift strides in educating their young people for jobs requiring knowledge and adaptive skills. From 1995 to 2005, the United States dropped from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> in college-graduation rates. China and India are projected to produce greater numbers of graduates, and therefore, more skilled workers. If skill supply remains constant, China's production will dramatically outpace the United States. By 2015, China will produce twice the number of postsecondary graduates as the United States and European Union combined. *Without the capability to compete in quantity, the United States must focus on quality.*

The global supply of skills and talent has implications for the United States. In this “flat world,” work that can be digitized, automated, and outsourced is done by the most effective providers. According to Andreas Schleicher, the United States still has the most qualified labor force and is best equipped to capitalize on globalization; however, during the last few decades, other countries have done a better job of expanding their talent pool.



Source: D. Autor, F. Levy, and R. Murnane (2003).

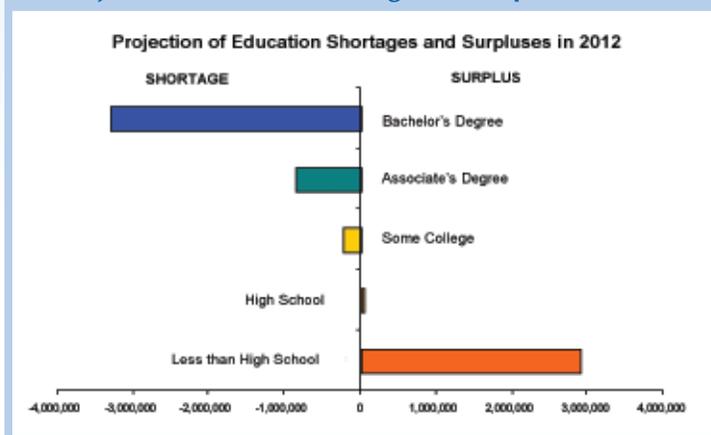
Anthony Carnevale shared current labor market trends that indicate significant churn within the United States economy, which loses about 5 million jobs per month to overseas markets. In addition, Carnevale identified the following factors, which also contribute to the churn, or turnover, in the workforce:

- The Baby Boomer generation will retire slower than previous generations. Still, labor markets are strained to find qualified workers, especially in skilled occupations.
- The middle class has declined, and it is still declining, with about half moving up and half moving down.

## CAN THE U.S. KEEP UP?

A high school diploma is no longer sufficient to ensure an individual's economic viability in this global marketplace. Providing quality postsecondary education and training is a critical component of a state's capacity to participate in the world economy. Yet, 2000 Census data show that only half of adults aged 25 or older have received some education beyond a high school diploma. Furthermore, 2006 data from the OECD reveal that only 38 percent of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 in the United States have an associate's degree or higher. According to the United States Department of Education, national college-going rates at four-year colleges and universities have increased for all groups of students, yet increases in college completion rates are not commensurate, especially among minority students. Between 1980 and 2004, the percentage of students completing a bachelor's degree or higher has increased 10 points for White students, only five points for African-American students, and only three points for Latino students. Without a more qualified workforce, the United States will continue to lose jobs to overseas markets.

### Projection of Education Shortages and Surpluses in 2012



Source: Anthony Carnevale (2006). Analysis of Current Population Survey (1992-2004) and Census Population Projection Estimates.

These trends are resulting in higher earnings for qualified workers in every industrialized country. In contrast, poorly qualified workers will experience increasing penalties for lack of education and skill. According to Schleicher, economic growth once accommodated workers at all levels of the skill distribution, but that is no longer the case. Those at the top end of the distribution have a greater advantage than those at the bottom of the distribution.

To support state efforts to produce a globally competitive workforce, colleges and universities must increase the number of students they attract and graduate. Given this increasingly significant role in developing the nation's workforce system, the higher education and K-12 education systems must work together to create shared goals and streamline efforts. In order to prepare more students for the modern economy, these systems must also be linked to projected state workforce needs.

The University of North Carolina, under the leadership of President Erskine Bowles, is engaged in a comprehensive effort to bring the 16-campus public higher education system in line with the workforce needs of the state – where low-skill manufacturing jobs are no longer a substantial part of the economic fabric. Bowles shared with governors his plans for developing a more “demand driven” system. Through his *UNC Tomorrow* initiative, Bowles appointed a commission that toured the state to learn from its citizens their concerns, aspirations, and needs. Bowles is already leading the University to support the state's workforce needs by producing more and better teachers, instituting collaboration between the community college and university systems, and reducing administrative costs and channeling more funds to education. The findings from the *Projection of Education Shortages and Surpluses in 2012* initiative will shape plans for continued connection between the state's workforce needs and university programs.



Goodwin Liu, University of California, Berkeley Law School

## EDUCATION CHALLENGES IN THE U.S.

Despite these alarming trends, state education systems have not adjusted to meet the global demands. Most state standards and assessments currently fail to define college and work-readiness. Even fewer look to top-performing countries to guide standards setting in their states.

Two international tests provide information about how the United States compares. One is PISA, which assesses the quality of learning outcomes among 60 or so industrialized countries, representing 90 percent of the world's economy. The PISA is unique in that it is designed to test 15 year old students' ability to apply knowledge rather than their ability to simply reproduce what they have learned. Critics of the PISA are concerned that it tests students on material that has not been learned in the classroom, and therefore, PISA results are an unfair representation of students' abilities. Supporters tout its ability to evaluate students' ability to apply knowledge, arguing that that is what is required in today's workplace.

A second test, the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), was designed to focus on the actual experiences of students in the classroom. It measures the knowledge and skills that fourth and eighth grade students have acquired in math and science.

According to the 2006 PISA results, the most recent international assessment, U.S. students scored below the average of the 30 OECD countries who participated. Results from the last three administrations of the test show that U.S. student performance in reading, math, and science has slipped in recent years, relative to international peers.

The 2003 TIMSS results showed fourth-grade students in other countries progressing ahead of fourth-grade students in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Between 1995 and 2003, U.S. fourth-grade performance remained constant in both mathematics and science. For the same period, U.S. eighth-grade performance in mathematics and science

	U.S. RANK		
	2000 PISA (27 countries compared)	2003 PISA (29 countries compared)	2006 PISA (30 countries compared)
READING	15th	20th	NA*
MATH	18th	23rd	25th
SCIENCE	14th	19th	21st

\*Due to a printing error on the PISA 2006 reading booklets in the U.S., reading performance data for the U.S. were excluded from the PISA database.

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007.

improved slightly; students posted better results than six other countries in mathematics, but were outperformed by students in seven countries. In science, U.S. students demonstrated higher scores than 11 other countries and were bested by students in five countries.

Global competition has sparked a lively discussion across the world regarding education. Many countries, especially in Asia, are making significant investments in education and are looking for the elements needed to build a successful, marketable workforce. According to Vivien Stewart and other international experts, the United States, as a country, does not appear engaged in this conversation. However, states are interested, and governors are looking for ways to develop an internationally capable workforce.



Governor Mike Easley, North Carolina



Governor Kathleen Sebelius, Kansas and Andreas Schleicher

## The Challenges of Standards-Based Reform

Given the critical role of state standards in education reform, governors engaged in conversation about the current status and challenges of a standards-based system. Having recently chaired a study of standards conducted by the National Research Council (NRC), and commissioned by the Hunt Institute, Lorraine McDonnell provided a brief history of the standards-based reform movement and described the current status of state standards. Standards have indeed become the cornerstone of state education systems; however, they have not reached their potential. The original intent was that standards would articulate learning goals and provide equal learning opportunities for students. Standards have brought greater awareness to students' academic performance, yet improvements toward narrowing the achievement gap have been modest. The quality of state standards is partially to blame. According to William Schmidt, who has extensively studied state content standards, most standards lack focus and rigor, are not concise, and do not reflect how students learn.

It was thought that the development of curriculum, instructional materials, teacher preparation, and assessment would flow from the standards. Yet, policymakers saw standards-setting as the end, rather than the beginning; therefore, alignment of the system has been inconsistent.

Dr. Andy Porter and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania analyzed data from 31 states and revealed significant variability among state content standards in reading, math, and science in grades K-8. One of the central findings of the recent NRC work, Porter's findings suggest that content standards within states repeat from grade to grade. This repetition of content does not challenge students to build knowledge from year to year and often means they merely relearn the same material from one grade to the next.

Michael Petrilli illustrated for governors the differences on state tests and the variability of performance standards. Contrary to fears, according to Petrilli, there has been "no race to the bottom," with states setting low cut scores to assure a high passing rate. Rather, low-standard states have raised cut scores, while some high-standard states have lowered their proficiency targets, resulting in a "walk to the middle."

With every state setting their own standards or goals for student learning, and with many stakeholders involved in the process, standards-setting is a laborious process that can result in heated political battles. Governors and other top policymakers must sometimes expend significant political capital in order to pass standards that are rigorous. Two governors shared their recent battles to update and raise standards, noting that some in the education community are continuing to lobby for lower standards.



Governor Phil Bredesen, Tennessee



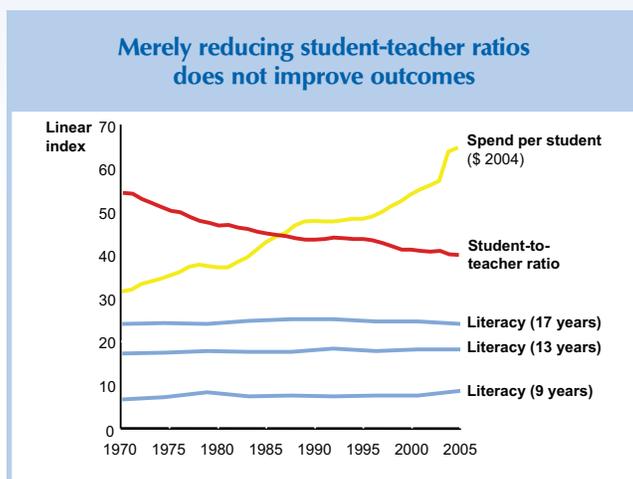
Michael Barber, McKinsey and Company

## STRATEGIES FROM TOP-PERFORMING NATIONS

*“High performance requires every child to succeed.” – Sir Michael Barber*

Sir Michael Barber provided an international view of education in America and offered ideas based on his recent study of the world’s top-performing education systems. From his perspective, ***solutions to the education challenges in the United States exist at the state level. Governors are best positioned to lead dramatic changes in education that will raise performance for the nation.***

Citing the 25-year experience of countries in the OECD, Barber noted that increased spending and lower student-teacher ratios alone did not lead to higher student performance. Such measures pay off, only as they are tied to proven practices and effective policies that enhance teacher quality – the most critical factor in educational improvement.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP, Hanushek (1998).

Barber drew from his analysis of the top-performing countries throughout the world and called attention to the differences between U.S. practices and those of its economic competitors. In general, his findings indicate the typical U.S. state falls short of best international practices. Barber identified four lessons that distinguish the world’s best education systems.

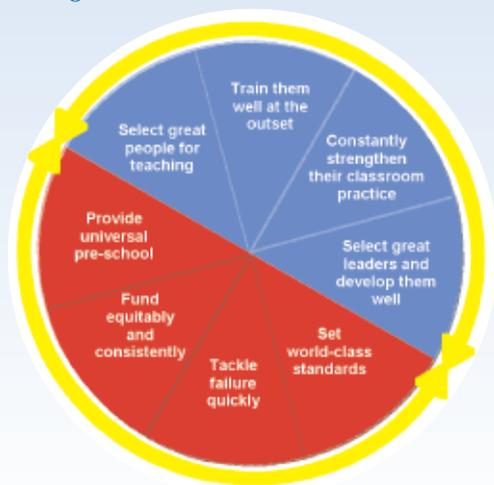
**The highest performing countries attract top graduates to the teaching profession.** Singapore recruits the top 30 percent of college graduates to become teachers, whereas in the United States, the bottom 30 percent of students become teachers. Korea and Finland are even more rigorous, recruiting the top 5 and 10 percent, respectively.

**Teachers in high-performing systems engage in effective professional development activities regularly.** Providing opportunities for teachers to improve their practice from day to day is critical to success, and it must be built into the system. Shanghai requires that teachers visit and observe lessons taught by their colleagues at least eight times per term. Also, teachers collaboratively develop model lessons and actively discuss excellent demonstration lessons. England trained 1,500 literacy experts to deliver model lessons in classrooms around the country.

**Great systems track the performance of all students to ensure continuous improvement.** A system of inspections and assessments provides useful feedback for schools to make changes for improvement. Assessments must be aligned to standards and connected to classroom practices. In addition, students with special needs must be appropriately supported. Classroom teachers in Finland identify students in need of additional support and provide intervention services with an expert teacher. Once students begin to make progress, they are promptly integrated back into mainstream classes.

**Strong school leaders ensure each teacher delivers effective instruction and improves practice.** Principal candidates must meet specific competencies to succeed. Singapore’s training program for new principals includes management and leadership courses, extensive time in schools and hands-on, problem-solving experiences, overseas corporate experience, and rigorous evaluation.

Eight key ingredients represent Barber’s view of what makes a strong education system that educates all students. Of these factors, several were discussed in more detail throughout the **Symposium**, including world-class standards, teachers and leaders, tackling school failure, and funding.



Source: Michael Barber, GES Presentation

Barber drew from his experiences as a leader of education reform under former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair and shared how their three-phase approach to improving education, specifically literacy performance in the primary grades, has unfolded during the last 10 years. The first phase of reform was driven by top-down mandates to close failing schools and hands-on intervention to assist ineffective local authorities toward improvement. To take a system from bad to adequate required heavy-handed guidance and support and a commitment to maintaining that support until the job is done. The second phase focused on creating sustainability within the system. With stability restored at the district and school level, best practices were promoted and circulated throughout the system. The third phase supports education leaders to use a service-oriented approach to delivering education to students. Government’s role is to manage rather than force top-down policies and programs.

## PRESSING ISSUES EXPLORED AND EMERGING THEMES

Throughout the **Symposium** governors engaged in active discussions with each other and the resource experts. From these discussions, some key themes emerged.

### STANDARDS

**A set of common standards could eradicate the inequities within the United States’ education system.**

The United States has good schools that do not always exist in good systems. Ensuring equity among schools requires a system that works together to educate all students to high standards. Effective systems in other countries have a set of national standards that guide instruction in the classroom and are typically set using a top-down approach. Barber and Schleicher both reinforced how focused other countries are on improvement and re-evaluation of the clarity of their standards. High-performing countries are using the data brought forth by international tests, such as TIMSS and PISA, to re-examine their standards and make necessary changes. By contrast, most U.S. states revise standards every five or six years, and use a bottom-up process that often leads to standards that are too broad and not specific enough to facilitate consistent instructional guidance.

A move toward unified standards could offer the nation an opportunity to re-examine American education and to

initiate a conversation about what it takes to make our students globally competitive. It would also demonstrate a serious commitment to an equitable system that is void of the geographic and socioeconomic disparities that limit students’ life choices.

### Options for implementing common standards in the United States

The NRC recently studied some options for how a common set of standards might be implemented. McDonnell shared findings from the NRC workshops and noted that “unified, common standards” should be national, not federal; a collaborative of states may decide to work together to develop uniform standards. The thrust of the NRC findings revolves around a framework for considerations that are needed when embarking upon an effort to develop common standards. Questions to ask include: Who develops the standards? In what subject and grades? Should content standards and performance standards be developed? Would curriculum materials, texts and assessments be part of the work?



Governor Tim Pawlenty, Minnesota



Governor Martin O'Malley, Maryland

McDonnell shared three lessons from the NRC work:

- Any effort toward common standards must control for the previous pitfalls of standards-based reform and ensure plans for building capacity within the system to implement the standards.
- Ensuring adequate preparation of and updating of skills for teachers must be at the forefront of any move to implement or change standards.
- There are political costs to this work that depend on the options considered and the political conditions within each state. Some states have a history of heated political battles that may deter any move toward a common set of standards. Other states may trust their process over any other process.

There are unique conditions in each state, which must be thoroughly considered. McDonnell indicated that even with common standards, it is reasonable to expect that a unique profile may still remain in each state.

### Political costs of standards setting

Governors who had recently fought to update their state's standards echoed the concerns McDonnell raised. One governor shared, "we spilled blood to raise our standards." Governors expressed concern over the political capital necessary to get higher standards in their states. McDonnell reinforced that having a champion at the state level is critical to help frame the conversation and anticipate potential problems and pitfalls. Governors agreed that common standards could provide some political cover for them to weather the criticism and resistance that is typical of the process. In the absence of common standards in the United States, governors, at the least, must ensure that their own individual state standards are updated to align with the global demand for skills.

**High, rigorous standards are critical to ensure the U.S. education system prepares students for the global marketplace.** States need to examine current standards and ensure they represent the skills needed for success in a global economy. Using international standards and benchmarks as a guide may help states establish learning priorities that transcend the political battles inherent in the current process. Governors in attendance expressed interest in and consensus about states' willingness to use international benchmarks as a guide for student learning.

Content standards in other countries are focused, rigorous, and coherent. Michigan State University's William Schmidt discussed with governors findings from the TIMSS and revealed the key characteristics of the top-achieving countries:

- Standards **focus** on a few topics rather than many topics.
- The level of **rigor** is greater. Throughout the world, middle school students take algebra and geometry, whereas in the United States basic arithmetic remains predominant. Lack of rigor is also evident in other subjects. For example, in the United States students in middle school learn the parts of the eye while students in other countries learn than how photons enter the eye. By the end of eighth grade, students in the United States are two years behind when comparing the content knowledge studied in other countries.
- Topics are sequenced from grade to grade with greater **coherence**. Standards are arranged in a logical manner; therefore, foundational knowledge is built over time and deepened from grade to grade. In the United States, it is common to see topics repeated from grade to grade.

### Connecting K-12 standards to higher education

Governors were interested in whether there is alignment between university placement tests and international tests. There is not a strong base of knowledge to support this inquiry. Some longitudinal studies are underway in Canada, but because entry requirements are so diverse, concrete conclusions are difficult to ascertain. Schleicher shared that representatives from the higher education community are involved in setting the OECD standards, but that such discussions are based on economics (e.g., employment and earnings), rather than on educational content.

Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano discussed her state's approach to link the K-12 and postsecondary systems to the workforce. By projecting the jobs that would be needed in the state, the system was then able to back-map the skills that graduates will need in order to secure and be successful in those jobs. Ensuring alignment among state systems is a critical component of promoting a healthy state economy.

Governors have led efforts to connect the K-12 and higher education systems. North Carolina Governor Mike Easley highlighted for fellow governors his efforts to increase the number of students who achieve postsecondary education. Leveraging the strength of North Carolina's Community College System and creatively combining funding streams, North Carolina's *Learn and Earn* program provides first-generation college-bound high school students the opportunity to earn an associate's degree with only one additional year of school. Dual enrollment programs have been implemented in a number of states, and they provide an effective bridge between the K-12 and postsecondary systems.

### Recent state efforts to update standards

Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm shared the process of updating state standards and noted that stakeholder buy-in to a shared goal – doubling the number of college graduates – was key to the success of their effort. With many stakeholders at the table, including public, private, and charter school leaders, parents, and labor and business leaders, and the support of Achieve and Michigan State University, standards in kindergarten through 8th grade were set and then high school standards followed two years later. Granholm indicated that another critical factor was the commitment to high standards by the state superintendent.

With higher standards now in place, Michigan is working to ensure capacity within the system. There is a significant need to upgrade skills among teachers, specifically in middle school mathematics where teachers must ensure students complete coursework in algebra before moving on to high school. Granholm anticipates high failure rates in algebra will spark political pushback to lower the standards. The ongoing need to build support among stakeholders is a critical component of maintaining a commitment to higher standards.

Former Governor Roy Romer shared his experiences as a governor and urban superintendent, reinforcing the importance of setting high standards at all levels. He cautioned that time must be built into the implementation plans to allow the students and teachers to adjust, especially those in the upper grades who were not exposed to higher standards in the lower grades.

Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen's experience was somewhat similar in that many stakeholders were involved, including members from the business and higher education communities. Like Michigan, Tennessee leveraged the support of Achieve to update standards. Bredesen echoed Granholm's concern that resistance to the higher standards will intensify as implementation woes emerge. Bredesen predicted that high failure rates among suburban schools may result prompt political momentum for lowering the standards. He encouraged his fellow governors to use the bully pulpit to explain to education leaders, policymakers, and the public how the world is different and why higher standards are so critical.



Ray Scheppach, National Governors Association

**Ensuring all schools are accountable for higher standards is challenging for states.** Standards are a necessary, but insufficient component of an education system that ensures all students are prepared. As governors discussed the possibility of common or national standards, the issue of accountability and enforcement was raised. Governors wondered, “where’s the hammer?” in making sure standards are implemented effectively in schools.

Barber shared his experiences regarding the implementation of education reform in England and noted that shifting the system from bad to adequate required a heavy-handed approach. Chronically failing schools were closed. In addition, struggling schools relinquished power to local authorities who leveraged education service contracts to promote dramatic improvements.

Barber stressed the need for thoughtful performance management systems. He observed the following trends among other countries:

- National standards guide instruction;
- Inspections and accountability are centralized; and
- Schools are responsible for implementation.

Several system-wide functions are needed to promote greater accountability among schools. The state should:

1. Develop a system of assessments, inspections, and review, which could include random visits and quality checks along with assessments at some grades and in some subjects.
2. Set a strategic direction that projects plans for the next five to ten years.
3. Ensure culture, capacity, and capability within the system, focusing on recruitment of teachers and school leaders.

**Equity lawsuits are unlikely to get involved in how education is delivered.** According to Goodwin Liu, law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, education lawsuits brought against states in recent years have shifted from a focus on equity to adequacy. Rather than asking if two schools compare equally, courts are asking whether the criteria for delivering education in a state is adequate. Though the word “standards” may not be used, courts are assessing whether states are providing a sufficient education for all students. Based on his study of this phenomenon in states across the country, Liu offered his opinion that courts are unlikely to use legislated standards, or set a performance bar, in their definitions of adequacy. Courts prefer to set their own definition, which are typically broad and focused on the civic mission of schools.



Governor Camacho, Guam

### **Governors promote flexibility**

Governors shared their experiences in recent years to respond to equity lawsuits that challenged the education system in their states. Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe noted that the shift from equity to adequacy in his state prompted them to raise the floor, stating that reaching that floor is the constitutional test by which everyone should be measured. He further noted that some districts would reach levels beyond the floor. While this continues inequality within the system it is not unconstitutional as long as the floor is adequate and in line with the standards required to be successful in the world.

Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius shared her experiences with a long-running lawsuit, noting the terminology used in her state is “suitable education” and the measure was based on funding. The Kansas Legislature responded to the ruling and set a framework that tied funding to state standards and underperforming schools. The Legislature required that money be distributed based on numbers of lower performing students. Sebelius noted that once “suitable” is met, then you can allow for the elasticity of higher performance.

**Great education systems can overcome the impact of socioeconomic factors on learning.** Some education systems throughout the world face greater challenges due to the social deficits that may exist. For example, children come from a variety of backgrounds, which can positively or negatively influence their school success. Even the number of words children hear by age four can vary significantly. Given the significant socioeconomic disparities that exist among communities in their states, governors were particularly interested in how education is affected by family income. The great education systems throughout the world can overcome these challenges with quality teachers.



Lorraine McDonnell, University of California, Santa Barbara

Governors were interested in OECD data that compared countries, and they wondered about the role of diversity and socioeconomic factors in U.S. education, as compared to other countries. Schleicher affirmed that the United States has the largest gap or broadest range of income factors, but reinforced that U.S. performance is not lower because of such factors.

Governors engaged in a robust discussion about other countries' ability to educate all students. The United States ranks 10th in the number of immigrants and nine other countries demonstrate higher performance, according to OECD data. Even with similar socioeconomic gaps to the United States, other countries do a better job of educating their students. These countries tend to be moderate on spending, and they generate and spend resources differently.

### **Disadvantaged students need additional support to achieve higher standards.**

From Schmidt's research, it is clear that the absence of clearly articulated standards negatively affects students from low-income communities. Data from local school districts show inequality in what students are expected to learn. For example, according to Schmidt, teachers in higher income districts took a week to cover specific content while teachers in lower income districts covered the same content over four months.

Effective education policy can overcome the impact of socioeconomic factors. As referenced by Barber and reinforced by others during the Symposium, some students need more support than others. With higher standards, policymakers and educators need to be sure all students have the appropriate supports and environment in order to reach those standards. A growing body of evidence points to the fact that an integrated approach serves students more effectively. This means providing educational, health, and social

supports within and outside the school day so that students' needs are viewed in a comprehensive, rather than in an isolated manner. Service agencies should work together at the state and local level to ensure funding is integrated across sectors to focus on the child.

### **HUMAN CAPITAL**

**Teachers are a critical factor. Make excellent teaching systemic rather than lucky.** More than any other factor, the quality of classroom instruction determines a student's success. Studies have shown that two students who are both at the 50th percentile can end up 53 percentile points apart after three years, depending on the quality of their teachers. Developing an education system that ensures every student receives a great lesson every single time is challenging. Teachers must have the skill, understanding, knowledge of the students in the room, equipment, passion, and expectation that they will deliver quality instruction every day and to every student.

Critical to the success of promulgating good teaching practices throughout the system is ensuring there is a foundation of effective standards for the state, and some would argue, for the country. According to Schmidt, studies have shown that most 3rd grade teachers in the United States are unaware which topics precede or follow the grade they teach. Teachers need a roadmap to bring coherent instruction to the classroom. Schools of education are also in need of a clear path as they prepare the nation's teachers.

Governors discussed the challenges they have faced with upgrading the teaching profession as content standards were raised. For example, with increased math requirements for middle school students, teachers must be able to deliver more rigorous content. States must consider the substantial plans and investments needed to ensure the teaching force is equipped for higher standards. Petrilli drew an analogy to *Reading First* and the fact that state departments of education engaged in significant capacity building to ensure teachers in the early grades were prepared for this shift. Petrilli encouraged governors to learn from the lessons of this endeavor.

A spirited discussion among the governors demonstrated their commitment to this issue, and governors outlined their own state efforts to provide mentors for inexperienced teachers. Governors were specifically interested in evidence that shows a mediocre teacher can improve. The New Teacher Center's Ellen Moir reinforced that the longer the mentoring relationship is in place, the greater the results are for students.

**Several key strategies for recruiting, preparing, and supporting teachers emerged, including:**

- Create scholarships to recruit teachers in high-need subjects, such as math and science.
- Require reauthorization of schools of education to re-evaluate programs for effectiveness. Continue funding for quality programs and discontinue those unable to produce results.
- Provide mentoring for new teachers.
- Work with university leaders to facilitate strong collaboration between the Dean of Education and the Dean of Arts and Sciences.

**Leadership is a critical component of success at the school level.**

The discussion about teachers led governors to inquire about school-level leadership. According to Barber, other countries have placed greater authority in the hands of the school leader or principal. With this authority, school leaders are able to provide instructional leadership for their schools and exercise true accountability for academic success.

Levine offered that school leadership programs in the United States need to be revamped to properly align incentive structures, improve quality, and ensure accountability. One specific strategy would require reauthorization of leadership programs, which would encourage greater quality and accountability for results. Governors agreed that without strong leadership at the school level, struggling schools are ill-equipped to make dramatic improvements.

Gubernatorial leadership is critical. Reinforcing Barber’s claim that leadership at the state level can make the difference in U.S. student performance moving forward, Governor Hunt encouraged governors to take bold steps to lead their states. Governors were forthright about the challenges inherent in their governance structures and suggested that they have limited control over education, but significant responsibility for making sure the education system is equipped to meet economic demands.

Governor Hunt challenged governors to come together as a group of states to create a set of world-class common standards. He posed that Congress could provide funding for assessments that align with the standards. Former West Virginia Governor Bob Wise

and Governor Romer both echoed Governor Hunt’s call for states to come together to develop common standards that move the nation toward educational improvement. Developing a common approach would limit the resources states now must use to create and update their own standards. To keep pace with the changing world, more frequent updating is required to ensure standards are rigorous and current. This places a significant burden on states. Governor Romer specifically encouraged governors to seek federal funding to implement a system that can achieve world-class standards. Funding to develop authentic assessments and administer them and to improve the teaching profession are among the tools states may need to deliver results.



Judith Rizzo, Hunt Institute



Governor Mike Beebe, Arkansas

## Education Finance Studied

One important issue that pervades state-level education policy decisions and is often the primary driver of education initiatives is funding. The topic was raised throughout the discussions, and experts from the School Finance Redesign Project were on hand for an in-depth discussion.

Education represents nearly 50 percent of total state government expenditures, but rising government service costs and competition with other sectors, such as Medicaid and infrastructure (e.g., transportation) costs, have placed constraints on education budgets. In addition, the 2007 *Fiscal Survey of the States* reports that overall state spending growth is slowing for most states. The standards-based movement has placed additional pressure on states to increase the effective use of education funding. Ensuring that all students meet higher standards and receive equitable educational resources requires more efficient use of funding.

***Evidence suggests that America's current method of school finance works against a focus on student learning.***<sup>7</sup>

Research indicates that various levels of government – federal, state, and local – prioritize education spending in ways that often conflict with each other. For example, many states are focused on narrowing the achievement gap, but the lack of clarity in how states allocate resources, the difficulty of channeling funds from different levels of government, and the lack of good data connecting specific funds to specific student groups make it difficult to tie funding to policy objectives.

The University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education established the School Finance Redesign Project to provide policymakers with answers to two essential questions:

- How much money will it take for all students to meet standards?
- How should the money be spent?

The Center has found that state financing systems should be modified to ensure that student learning drives education finance decisions and recommends five policy changes, including:

1. Make sure what gets distributed is dollars;
2. Redesign distribution policies to better channel funds between layers of government to the school;
3. Ensure that funding allocations are driven by student needs;
4. Clean up allocation formulas and other barriers to coherent allocation; and
5. Track and report all allocations to schools by student need.



Governor Janet Napolitano, Arizona



Governor Brian Schweitzer, Montana



Governor Granholm, Michigan

## CONCLUSION

The 2008 Governors Education Symposium took place as the nation prepared for a general election. Knowing that America will have a new president in less than a year offered the opportunity for governors to consider how new leadership could renew efforts to upgrade our nation's schools.

The two days of conversations generated an understanding of an interconnected of steps that would lead to school improvements in both the short and long term. The Symposium ended with these understandings:

- Governors play a critical role in forging and advancing American education policy. Gubernatorial leadership is needed at both the state and national levels to shape effective policies.
- The United States needs to ensure greater equity in education, as well as higher achievement, by adopting content and performance standards to eliminate disparities in what is taught from school to school and from district to district.
- Adoption of common standards would form part of a package of initiatives that would also include upgrading instruction.
- States must move boldly to improve the corps of teachers and to intensify the preparation of principals for their role as instructional leaders.
- States and local school districts should dramatically improve the recruitment of and support for new teachers who need mentoring by experienced teachers.
- The economy demands education beyond high school. Young adults require a job-ready credential or a university degree to propel them into the middle class. For states, this economic demand means increased emphasis on collaboration between and among elementary and secondary schools, community colleges, and universities that can nimbly respond to workforce needs.
- Education funding structures should be linked to student outcomes.

Governors recognized that they face political and fiscal barriers in moving forward on such a demanding agenda. Still, the Symposium reaffirmed that governors have indeed led their states to make significant changes and that governors remain a catalyst for the educational progress and success of the nation as a whole.

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