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ABSTRACT

In light of the 10th anniversary of "A Nation at Risk," this report attempts to answer some of the questions about the southern states' educational accomplishments of the past decade. After the introduction, three sections address the following questions: (1) What is different today? (2) Why are we disappointed? and (3) What are we learning? The first section notes the following developments: a focus on a wide range of student achievement standards; tougher college admission standards that did not deter enrollment; an overall increase in achievement due to higher standards; an increase in school readiness programs; higher teacher certification standards; attention to educational leadership; and increased funding for education. The biggest disappointment is the lack of success in dealing with the growing population of disadvantaged students. Other shortfalls concern student achievement, dropout rates, students who are inadequately prepared for the job market and college, and an inadequate supply of quality and minority teachers. Lessons learned in the past 10 years are to emphasize student results; recognize that improvement is a longterm commitment; establish clear, measurable goals; and develop partnerships among schools, colleges, and communities. (LMI)

Looking Back at a Decade of Educational Improvement

What Is Different Today?

Why Are We Disappointed?

What Are We Learning?

Southern Regional Education Board

The Southern Regional Education Board is the nation's first interstate compact for the advancement of education. For 45 years, SREB has been identifying and directing attention to key issues in education; collecting, compiling, and analyzing comparable educational data; conducting studies on educational concerns; and initiating discussions directed to state and institutional long-range planning, actions, and policy proposals affecting education. The fifteen SREB states are: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas. Virginia, and West Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

The 10th anniversary of *A Nation at Risk* is a time to reflect on the educational and economic aspirations of a region covering the Southern quarter of the United States–an area once described by President Franklin Roosevelt as "the nation's number one economic problem." This region–which includes the 15 states comprising the Southern Regional Education Board–now aspires to be a leading economic force in the nation and the world.

This aspiration to economic leadership began years ago, spurred on by a new breed of political and business leaders who saw past the region's problems to its great potential. As state after state bought into this economic development goal, state leaders acknowledged that it could not be reached without developing a work force that was better prepared in science, mathematics, reading, writing, and computing–all in times when competition among public services for available tax dollars would only increase.

In 1981, the SREB Task Force on Higher Education in the Schools issued a call for action to improve public education at every level. In its report *The Need for Quality*, the Task Force recognized a "quality crisis in education in the region." The report spoke of a growing disillusionment with public education and a need not only to secure basic competencies but to push academic standards well beyond the bare minimum.

". . . Over the last generation," the Task Force wrote, "the South has made tremendous strides toward the improvement of education . . . . But these accomplishments should not mask the serious questions about quality that confront us today." Two years later, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued an even sterner warning when it described a nation at risk from a "rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future. . . ."

In the decade following *A Nation at Risk*, through its many programs and publications, the Southern Regional Education Board called upon state leaders to bring schools and higher education together in partnerships to improve education at all levels. The responsibility for quality education was no longer the exclusive province of educators. In the early 1980s, governors and legislators became leaders in education reform. By mid-decade, corporate leaders–who were searching for ways to reinvigorate their own businesses and retrain their work forces–also joined in the effort to improve schools and colleges. In some states, business executives became active partners with government leaders in forming alliances and supporting tax increases for education.

This growing commitment for educational reform in the region was marked in 1988 by the publication of SREB's *Goals for Education: Challenge 2000*. The 12 SREB goals anticipated the national goals adopted in 1989 by the President and the nation's governors, and many SREB states included the goals in their own targets for the year 2000.

Yesterday's "Bold Experiments" Questioned Today

The decade of the 1980s was a time of ferment and experimentation. In response to what many leaders perceived as weak performance at the local school level, most states passed laws that invested state government with more control over school matters. These actions were widely praised

by national leaders and the press as a commendable and forthright search for excellence–or as *Time* magazine put it in a cover headline, a "Bold Quest for Quality."

But what was once hailed as bold experimentation is being seriously questioned today. Some now argue that the "top-down" prescriptions that were a feature of many state plans did not produce the educational gains hoped for by the governors, legislators, business leaders, and educators who were the architects of improvement in the 1980s.

Should state leaders–as some suggest–relax state-level control and allow local schools to manage education with only state goals and yet-to-be-developed accountability systems to guide them? How will states guard against a return to the kinds of situations that led to the reforms of the 1980s–situations where many school districts with "local control" did a poor job of educating students?

Most state education improvement efforts began in earnest during the 1985-86 school year. Most of the children who entered kindergarten that year are in the seventh grade today–a little more than half way through elementary/secondary schooling. As we examine school change in the region over these few years, what can we say about the successes and failures? We know that states have not accomplished all they tried to do. Some strategies failed; others were never implemented properly or funded adequately. A number of things worked–or appear to be working.

As a region, the SREB states "took the point"–they led the country on a journey unprecedented in their history to increase the quality of their schools and colleges. Important lessons are being learned along the way.

This report attempts to answer some questions about the accomplishments of the last decade and to suggest a middle course for the 1990s that neither clings to the strategies of the past nor rejects them out-of-hand. It recognizes that there is no single act that will eliminate all the problems of our education system. At the same time, it supports a belief that fundamental education change is possible.

Three questions stand out as we look back on a decade of major efforts at education change:

- **What is different today?**
- **Why are we disappointed?**
- **What are we learning?**

WHAT IS DIFFERENT TODAY?

The goal to improve education has gotten even tougher for many states in the region as they struggle with the most severe budget shortfalls since the early 1980s. How do states maintain the momentum to improve quality when the first order of business for many governors, legislatures, and educators is to balance the budget, as economic indicators send ever-changing signals?

Many analysts believe that the current economic difficulties and uncertainties will be temporary and that a modest recovery is underway--even as major companies continue to reduce their numbers of employees. We have to believe that future education budgets will not be repeats of recent years. The more important problem in the long run is not the recent budget shortfalls, but the decisions we make about moving educational reform forward in the 1990s.

In the past decade, some problems that have an impact on quality education have gotten worse. Today, there is a greater separation between the "haves" and the "have-nots." One million more children live in poverty. More students start life underweight with an unmarried teenage mother who may be addicted to drugs or alcohol. Some large urban school districts report that many hundreds of their students are homeless.

And the challenges brought about by social forces outside the school are not limited to traditionally disadvantaged young people. The number of single parent families with children under 18 has increased by almost two million since 1980. Less than half of our high school seniors read a book, magazine, or newspaper each day. Drug use remains a serious problem even with what appears to be some decline in the percentage of youth involved with drugs. The federal government reports depressing news of widespread alcohol consumption by American teenagers. In the same age group, suicides continue to increase, and they remain highest among white middle class males.

Clearly, as schools and colleges worked on educational improvement during the 1980s, they did so in an increasingly challenging environment. The good news is that even though the job of education did not get any easier, the decade of the Eighties was a time of dramatic and potentially very significant change.

Standards of Achievement

Many state actions emphasized student achievement; these actions ranged from the adoption of more stringent college admission standards and high school graduation requirements to minimum academic standards for participation in high school athletic programs.

- ✓ By 1989, new high school graduation standards were in effect in all SREB states. The required credits increased from 18 or fewer in most states to at least 20 in all but one state.
- ✓ Most SREB states used standardized minimum competency tests–usually in the form of high school exit examinations–to make certain that high school graduates had acquired certain basic skills before receiving a diploma.

- ✓ Most states established special recognition programs (advanced studies or honors diplomas) to challenge students to go beyond the standard high school graduation requirements and even beyond the college prep curriculum. Many more students participated in these programs than expected.
- ✓ Most SREB states now have in effect or have recommended an increased number of units in college preparatory courses for admission to four-year colleges and universities. These requirements have increased the number of academic courses taken by students in high school.
- ✓ All SREB states now encourage schools and students to actively participate in The College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) program, which provides a way for high schools to offer college-level courses to talented students, who may then obtain college credit for them.
- ✓ Colleges and universities also defined more clearly the skills students need to be successful in college work. States and institutions have developed standards for placement into and exit from remedial/developmental courses.
- ✓ Some colleges and universities began to supply better information to high schools about student performance and success in college. Most SREB states now require colleges to report on the readiness and performance of college freshmen.

Higher Standards and College Enrollment

The decision by states to establish higher standards raised several questions about future college enrollments and access to higher education. Would the tougher admission standards lower college enrollments? Would these standards reduce the number of minority students in higher education?

- ✓ The number of students of all races who attend college increased significantly during the 1980s, even though the high school/college age population declined. A larger share of high school graduates were attending college as we entered the 1990s.
- ✓ In those states where minimum course requirements for admission to public four-year colleges have been in place long enough to have some impact, students seem to be responding well. For example, in South Carolina, more than 80 percent of college freshmen now meet all of the prerequisites, compared to only 47 percent of those who entered the year before the requirements went into effect.

The Impact of Higher Standards on Achievement

The push for higher graduation requirements and a high school exit examination also provoked debate among policymakers and educators. Would more stringent high school graduation requirements increase dropouts? Would student performance improve?

- ✓ School attendance increased in most SREB states and remained stable in others.

- ✓ High school graduation rates (the percentage of 9th graders who graduate from high school four years later) increased in most SREB states for all ethnic groups.
- ✓ Average SAT and ACT scores in most SREB states are slightly higher than they were in 1980, even though a larger percentage of high school seniors are taking the test–a factor that typically lowers average scores.
- ✓ According to results from the National Assessment for Educational Progress, students in the region made modest gains in mathematics and science between 1982 and 1986 at all three age groups tested (9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds).
- ✓ The number of students in SREB states taking Advanced Placement examinations is more than twice the number in the early 1980s. In 10 SREB states, the percentage of these high school students scoring high enough to earn college credit exceeds the national average.
- ✓ More students are enrolled in science, mathematics, and foreign language courses in high schools.

Schools Responded to New Standards

By the late 1980s, stricter high school graduation and college admission standards began to have the anticipated "ripple" effect, as schools took actions to help students meet the new requirements.

- ✓ Schools began to examine all parts of the high school curriculum–not just the college preparatory track. Several states have eliminated or are considering eliminating the often dead-end "general" track. The academic content of vocational programs is getting new emphasis.
- ✓ Some states now require exit examinations from "gatekeeper" courses like Algebra I.
- ✓ Many states now monitor the progress of students from kindergarten through grade 12 with statewide testing programs designed around a continuum of skills to provide feedback about a student's progress.
- ✓ School readiness programs for four- and five-year-olds, which began in many states in the late 1980s, should result in higher achievement gains throughout elementary and secondary school, lower dropout rates, and more students prepared for and attending college by the end of the 1990s.
- ✓ By 1990, most SREB states had initiated plans to reduce dropouts and were publishing and distributing information on dropout prevention efforts. Many states raised the compulsory school attendance age and passed laws denying driver's licenses to students who are not in school.

Improvements in Higher Education

Another "spin off" of the establishment of higher standards has been action to improve college instruction, and to promote school/college cooperative efforts.

- ✓ Colleges and universities expanded and refined programs to attract and retain students. Included in such programs were strategies to identify, recruit, and retain minorities (especially blacks and women) and older students. Better orientation, counseling, and advisement programs were developed for entering students.
- ✓ Institutions of higher education also began to examine their core curricula and to assess the effectiveness of their programs of study–especially for undergraduate students.
- ✓ Actions to assess institutional effectiveness have been taken by legislatures and higher education governing boards in most SREB states. They include statewide testing programs to measure student achievement prior to beginning junior year coursework, monitoring student retention and graduation rates, surveys of graduates and employers of graduates, and the results of graduate and professional school entrance examinations and teacher certification tests.
- ✓ Two-year colleges and high schools developed joint programs that combined high school and postsecondary technical curricula to enable students to earn a high school diploma and complete a two-year technical college degree in five years.
- ✓ "Academic Alliances" began to develop between college and university faculties and high school teachers in the same discipline to discuss ways to improve teaching methods, student performance, and student preparation for college.

Teachers and Teaching

In 1981, SREB's *The Need for Quality* report stressed that improvements in the teaching profession would require changes along several fronts, including teacher recruitment, preparation, selection, compensation, and working conditions. States took action in some of these areas–and did less in others.

- ✓ From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, teacher salaries in the SREB states almost doubled. In recent years, some of the momentum to improve teacher salaries has been lost to economic downturns.
- ✓ Fourteen SREB states lowered the teacher-pupil ratio during the 1980s. The teaching force in the SREB region grew by 13.5 percent, while the national force grew 7.5 percent.
- ✓ Many SREB states reversed a downward trend in the percent of college students who choose teaching as a career. Across the region, college-bound high school seniors' interest in education majors increased significantly during the 1980s.

- ✓ Higher salaries, teacher loan programs, and intensive teacher recruitment programs in some states helped avoid a general shortage of teachers during the decade.
- ✓ Most SREB states took some action intended to reverse the decline in the minority teacher supply, using special financial incentives and long-term high school and middle school recruitment programs to address the problem.
- ✓ Most SREB states raised standards to enter teacher education through the use of entrance examinations, grade-point-average requirements, or both.
- ✓ Several SREB states moved to strengthen the academic content of teacher education programs by requiring prospective teachers to take more coursework in academic subjects and limiting the number of education courses institutions can require.
- ✓ Most SREB states now require teachers to pass a written examination and a performance evaluation during the first year of teaching, prior to granting full certification.
- ✓ SREB states experimented with alternative teacher certification programs, although most produced modest numbers of new teachers. Some states allow college graduates to teach while they earn a traditional teaching degree; others allow streamlined pedagogical preparation and quick classroom entry.
- ✓ Some SREB states established beginning teacher programs aimed at helping new teachers be successful.
- ✓ Most SREB states experimented with teacher incentive pay programs or career ladder programs.
- ✓ School/university partnerships in several SREB states are nationally recognized for developing model programs that promote site-based decision making by teachers and principals.

Educational Leadership

Over the decade, states took some important first steps in the assessment and training of school administrators, with a particular emphasis on the principal.

- ✓ Principal assessment centers were begun in most SREB states. About half are operated by state departments of education and others by universities. In general, they assess candidates on their grasp of school management techniques and their ability to perform effectively in a simulated school environment.
- ✓ Principal leadership academies now operate in most SREB states. Academy programs vary widely from state to state, but they generally concentrate on short-term training in management, including planning, budgeting, school law, and community relations.

More Money for Elementary and Secondary Education

The Need for Quality called for measures to eliminate waste and duplication but cautioned that additional funds would be needed to pay for quality elementary and secondary education. Over ensuing decade, most SREB states increased funding–and some states went well beyond the levels that might have been anticipated in the early 1980s.

- ✓ The SREB region showed larger average gains in per-pupil spending than the nation during the 1980s. This is even more significant when one considers that regional enrollments were growing and national enrollments were falling. Ten SREB states increased their per-pupil spending by more than the national average.
- ✓ Legal challenges to state education funding plans occurred in half of the SREB states, with sometimes dramatic results, as in Kentucky.
- ✓ In the 1980s, the SREB states increased spending on teachers' salaries at a higher rate than the nation, and the SREB states accounted for two-thirds of the growth in the national teaching force.
- ✓ Although most SREB states made very significant investments in teacher compensation during the decade, many increased spending in other areas even more. As a result, expenditures for teacher salaries were a smaller share of total K-12 expenditures in 1990 than in 1981.

WHY ARE WE DISAPPOINTED?

In the 1980s, the SREB states led the nation in educational improvement. Today, other states still emulate the accountability and incentive programs developed in our region. The SREB states reaffirmed for the nation the importance of goals and expectations. We can take some real pride in these accomplishments.

At the same time, there is disappointment that early, dramatic results have not been forthcoming. We see too few visible signs of change. Things look much the same as they did in 1985–the school year is still on the old agricultural calendar; the high school schedule looks about the same; and classroom practice hasn't changed much.

Why are we disappointed? Here are some of the reasons we may agree on:

- ***Student achievement.*** Although we have made significant progress in the basic skills, we have not raised academic performance to acceptable levels across the board.

  College entrance examination scores actually went up in most SREB states, even though the percentage of students taking the tests grew–defying the conventional testing wisdom that scores will drop as the percentage of test takers goes up. Still, average scores in the region did not improve much, and most SREB states continued to lag behind the nation in performance.

  The reports comparing the performance of U.S. students with students in Germany, Japan, Korea, England, Sweden and elsewhere are discouraging, if somewhat dated. We continue to wonder if our students can really match up to the students of other industrialized nations.

- ***Dropout rates.*** Dropout rates are still too high–although poor data leave us uneasy about whether progress is being made. Some recent national, state, and local reports suggest that the dropout rate has fallen since 1980, especially among blacks. But until we have comparable definitions of "dropout" and constant, uniform data, we really cannot be sure how we are doing.

- ***Job preparation.*** Businesses and industries continue to report that many high school graduates do not have the skills to succeed in jobs that should require no more than a high school education.

- ***Remedial education in college.*** We still have too many college freshmen who need remedial help before they can do regular college work. More than a third of all freshmen in the region take a remedial reading, writing, or mathematics course. Even at some research universities, a fourth of the freshmen do remedial work.

- ***Teacher supply.*** The new teacher pool still contains too few college graduates from the upper ranks of the class, and states have not yet been able to demonstrate much success in reversing the decline of the minority teacher supply.

- ***Teacher education.*** Although there are individual success stories, we have little confidence that our colleges and universities have significantly improved teacher preparation programs. Most students still study teaching methods in classes dominated by lecture; the clinical preparation of many student teachers is still limited to a brief stint as a "practice teacher;" and degree programs still lack enough upper-level work in specific academic disciplines.

- ***Teacher certification.*** After a decade of often intense criticism, few states have revamped their teacher certification systems to stress academic preparation, alternative entry routes, or ease of transfer from one state to another. While many states have invested heavily in recruitment in an effort to shore up the teacher supply, few have taken steps to make the certification process easier for teachers who might come from out of state.

While these unresolved issues may disappoint and even frustrate state leaders who have fought hard for educational improvement, we need to remember that the battle was joined only a few years ago. Although important education reform efforts were underway in SREB states long before they occurred elsewhere in the nation (most notably in Florida and Mississippi), few states began their reform efforts before the 1985-86 school year. Bills had to be written, debated, and enacted; funding had to be approved. In most states, several years passed before the legislated changes were actually implemented in the school and classroom.

Were we unrealistic to think that our region could make up for a century of running behind *and* address the modern ills faced by every American school--all in six or seven years' time? It will be years before we can measure how tougher college admission standards and high school graduation requirements affected the academic progress of the kindergarten students of 1985. We haven't had much time to watch things work.

What's more, we have not always done what we said we were going to do. No state has fully funded its educational improvement program. Some states have fallen far short. Some states passed reforms without the money to put the new programs in place. Can we say that those reforms "failed?"

For the one-third of our students who are preparing for college, some of our schools are doing a pretty good job--although few would argue that we are fully challenging these students, let alone those who are wandering through high school "general tracks." Our greatest disappointment may be our lack of success with the growing population of disadvantaged students. Helping more of these students achieve at higher academic levels remains our greatest challenge.

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

For most of the past decade, SREB states ran hard to improve education. They regained some lost ground, and they even nudged ahead in some areas. The challenge now is to learn from our experiences and press forward. We have embarked on a long voyage, and mid-course corrections are always necessary. When NASA scientists sent astronauts to the moon, they knew where they wanted the flight to go, and they had the technology and other resources to get there–but they still had to make more than half-a-dozen adjustments in direction.

The restructuring of American business is often cited as a model for educational improvement. But Motorola and other industrial corporations have been working for more than a decade to bring about significant change, according to the president of the National Center on Education and the Economy.

"These companies' experiences offer many parallels to our own efforts to restructure our schools," he says. "In both cases, we are dealing with systematic reform–a vast effort to set clear goals, to create clear measures of progress toward those goals, and to push decisions about how to reach those goals down to the service-delivery levels of the organization."

Corporations have the freedom to make these changes without the restrictions on public agencies, yet their story is one of "unrelenting frustration and persistence." Like education, he says, "people are asking for results when we haven't even completed the design work–never mind implementing the design."

If state leaders choose to take the "long view" of educational improvement, the important question becomes: Wh*at are we learning that can help us complete and implement the design of our comprehensive program?*

The First Lesson: Emphasize Results for Students

We began the effort to improve education in the early 1980s with a focus on standards and requirements. More coursework. More challenging subject matter. More hours in the school day, and more days in the school year. High school exit exams. Tests to prove minimum competency in the basic skills. Laws allowing the state to intervene in "educationally bankrupt" school systems. New certification requirements for teachers.

Today, we are learning that while these things are important, they are not sufficient. State leaders believed that firm requirements would be enough to force changes in the system and improve student performance. And those requirements did improve the basic skills of most of our students. But we moved hills when we hoped to move mountains.

We are learning that we must sharpen our focus to the point where our first priority is not *requirements*–as necessary as they are–but *results for students.* The distinction is important. Those responsible for education need to know what is required, but they also need to know that success will be measured by results. State policymakers are beginning to see the need to apply the same

principle to their own actions. Does this program improve student performance? If not, why do we need it? Why are we spending money on it? How can we shift the focus to results?

Consider, for example, that every SREB state has increased the mathematics requirements for graduation during the last decade. As a result, the number of mathematics courses taken by students has doubled or tripled. High schools met the higher requirements, but how did they do it? In many cases the content of the new courses is little more than spruced-up junior high mathematics. In some states, students can take two or three years of mathematics and meet their graduation requirements without ever taking Algebra I or its equivalent.

If our measure of success is whether we have more students taking more mathematics courses, then we have achieved our goal. But if our focus is on results, we ask instead: *Have the mathematics competencies of high school students improved significantly as a result of the increased graduation requirements?* In many cases the answer appears to be "no"–leading us to the conclusion that we need a new, more effective strategy. Careful evaluation of the graduation policy might reveal that high schools created the watered-down mathematics courses to avoid high rates of failure among students who traditionally have not performed well in "higher mathematics" classes. The solution may be to adopt new "applied" mathematics courses that introduce higher mathematics concepts differently–and to invest in training for the teachers who will be asked to teach mathematics in a new way.

This "results-for-students" way of thinking about educational improvement has broader applications. The widely discussed Kentucky reform program applies this principle to state department of education reorganization, to local school decision-making, to statewide testing and assessment programs, and to the preparation and certification of teachers. Other states are also making "mid-course corrections" in their reform programs by applying this same "results for students" standard.

This approach recognizes that educational change is complex. Any specific action can initiate a chain of reactions both predicted and unpredicted. By concentrating on results, we can better sort through the causes and effects, making adjustments until the design is complete. We come to see that no *single* action or activity is likely to produce the results we desire and that no *single* measure is likely to tell us if our efforts have been successful.

Other Lessons We Are Learning

- **We are learning that *we have to be in educational improvement for the long haul...***

  We said all along that we knew this, but our actions have spoken louder than our words. For two decades, the dropout rate in America stayed about the same. Did we really think this long-standing problem–rooted deeply in our social structure–was going to be turned around in less than a decade?

  Being in educational improvement "for the long haul" does not mean massive spending increases year after year. It does mean giving promising programs and ideas the time and money they need to work. Can we honestly say that we have stuck with our commitments and given them time to show results?

■ **We are learning that *high expectations make a difference. . .***

When colleges and universities raised course requirements for admission, the number of students taking college prep courses rose dramatically. When schools offered special diplomas for high academic achievement, students enrolled in large numbers. When teachers and students in our region were challenged to master college-level coursework and earn college credit on Advanced Placement examinations, they beat the national average. Where else in our policies and programs can we take advantage of the fact that high expectations pay off?

■ **We are learning that *clear, measurable goals are the surest way to keep educational improvement efforts on course when leadership changes and finances fall. . .***

How do we sustain momentum when our leaders change at state and local levels and financial problems shift the focus from quality improvement to survival? Leadership changes are a fact of life, but they present special challenges to states' long-term educational improvement when the governor, and therefore often the governor's educational policies, change every four to eight years. Nationally, more than one-third of the governors who signed the national education goals document in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1989 are not in office today.

The average tenure of an urban school superintendent is little more than three years, and more than half of the superintendents in one SREB state have been in their jobs less than two years. No more than one or two chief state school officers in the region have served long enough to see a class of first-graders through high school. And many college or university presidents do not serve long enough to see an incoming freshman class graduate.

We see how difficult it can be to maintain a course of action. We cannot escape change and uncertainty, but clear, measurable goals–broadly agreed upon–can keep us on track, even when transitions in leadership and bad economic times slow our progress. Does your state have consensus about where it ought to be going and what measures are needed to be sure it is getting there?

■ **We are learning that *colleges and schools each have a responsibility in the preparation of new teachers. . .***

We have raised salaries and taken other steps to recruit and retain a quality teaching force, but we have little evidence that teachers are better at their jobs today than they were a decade ago.

Improving the preparation of teachers is clearly among the most important actions we can take to improve our schools. Yet, after a decade or more of talking about the problem, how much can states and universities demonstrate that they have done to upgrade teacher preparation? The debate, such as it is, is still focused on the colleges and universities, where we have made some progress in following through on the notion that teachers cannot teach what they do not know. Some states now require more academic content for teacher education majors and restrict the number of education courses required for a degree. But we have not acted on our certain knowledge that quality teachers do not emerge fully prepared from our colleges and universities.

The job of the college or university is to graduate a trainable teacher who is well-grounded in theories of teaching and academic content. It should be the ultimate responsibility of the schools–with college support–to provide the clinical preparation in the school classroom that is so important to teaching success. Colleges are where people are prepared to teach; schools are where they learn how to teach. Are we asking the hard questions about teacher preparation and demanding action? Have we clearly defined the role of colleges and the role of schools in insuring quality teachers?

Business, industry, and the professions expect to train their college-educated employees, and they accept the costs involved as a necessary investment. Are we willing to make the same investment and establish preparation programs for beginning teachers in our schools?

■ **We are learning that *people don't change just because they have the opportunity. . .***

The efforts to implement teacher career ladders and incentive programs taught us this lesson. We are learning the same lesson again as states try to implement site-based management and shared decision-making at the school level. Change comes hard, and new policies that modify the roles of teachers, principals, school superintendents, college faculty, state education staff, parents, and others must be designed with the assumption that there will be resistance to change.

Are we trying to change behavior and create new roles without providing the outside support and extra staff time that is needed to work through the kinks? If you are waiting to see change just because your new state policies provide the opportunity for flexibility and change, you are waiting to be disappointed. Is your state providing assistance to help persons see new ways of doing things and to implement these new ways?

■ **We are learning that *leadership is the solution to many of our problems, but we still have trouble acting on our knowledge. . .***

We may pay more to hire a person we think is a leader, but we will not invest five cents on the dollar of that person's salary in real leadership development–the kind that equips people to change things and not just manage them. We know that proposals to move the important decisions about teaching and learning to the local level will not work without risk-taking leaders, and we have evidence from business and industry that we can identify and develop individuals with leadership traits. Given what we know, what have we done to produce the thousands of leaders and change agents we need in education?

■ **We are learning that *schools can't do the job alone. . .***

Schools cannot blame the rest of society when they fail to educate children. But schools do share the responsibility for education with others. Educators need the support of parents and the volunteer help of community and business leaders to create an environment of high expectations.

Many of our "at risk" students are served not only by schools but by health and social service agencies. Schools and service agencies often have the same clients, and they have knowledge to

share about those clients. A few extraordinary partnerships between school districts and social service agencies are proving that joint strategies can make at-risk students more successful in school. But we have not yet learned how to make such partnerships routine. How can we create the conditions that will finally bring these agencies together on behalf of students?

- **We are learning that *we do not have all the tools and information we need to have effective accountability programs. . .***

Most states are just beginning to develop education accountability programs. In the process they are learning that the information needed to make these programs fair and effective is often missing.

We have spent billions on school improvement programs across the region, but we have spent very little on thorough, third-party evaluation of those programs. We have tests today that can measure student achievement, but each has its limitations. Some tests are too narrow in focus; some do not permit comparison from state to state; some do not assess critical thinking well.

The spotty data collection and analysis in most states make it difficult for policymakers to make decisions with confidence. Many states are now using "report cards" to compare school and district results for students, but in many instances, the grade is an "incomplete" because the data needed are missing.

Does your state have enough information to judge whether it is getting a good return on investments in school improvement?

- **We are learning that *educational technology can improve teaching and learning. . .***

We have growing evidence that computer software programs, satellite feeds, electronic bulletin boards, interactive networks, and multimedia equipment can improve instruction. But few teachers and principals are well-trained in the use of such technology, and few colleges and universities use such technology in their own teacher preparation programs. Are we in a position that will make it possible to best take advantage of educational technology today and more advantage of the technology of tomorrow?

SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES WORKING TOWARDS GOALS

A decade after the National Commission's landmark report, our system of public education and our economic future remain "at risk." However, as this review of the past decade demonstrates, the SREB states have shown a willingness and a determination to reduce risk through investment, planning, and experimentation.

At times of uncertainty--about future revenues and future directions for education--it is important to affirm the guiding principles set forth in SREB's *Goals for Education: Challenge 2000*.

Our plans must be built on the idea that it is impossible to separate the question of the quality of a state's elementary and secondary schools and its colleges. Neither can be much better in quality than the other. Approximately 90 percent of most states' high school graduates attend college in their home state, and similarly, most school faculty and administrators are graduates of in-state colleges and universities.

Finally, what we do or fail to do--not some uncontrollable chain of events--will determine the fate of education. The citizens of any state are not likely to achieve more in education than they and their leaders expect and aim for. Clear, long range goals that focus on results and outcomes can help when a state's leadership changes and when revenues force choices among desirable actions.

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