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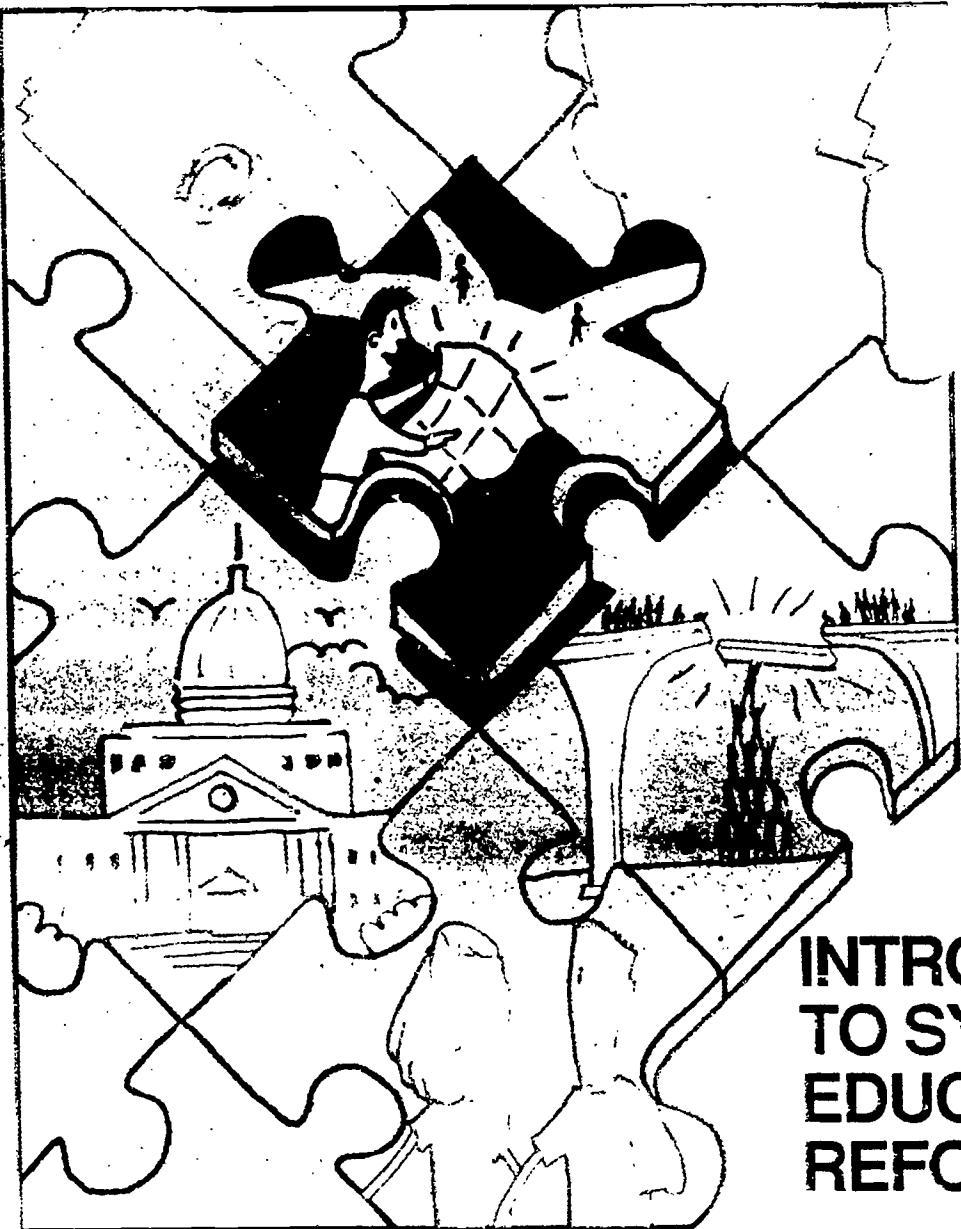
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ABSTRACT

Widespread educational reform will occur only if encouraged by a coherent policy environment that explicitly supports fundamental change and unleashes the imagination and energy of students, teachers, parents, and community leaders. To prepare students well for the 21st century, our education system requires an interdisciplinary environment, a curriculum stressing lifelong learning skills, varying teacher roles, increased student learning responsibility, improved assessment methods, creative use of time and space, more individualized instruction, diverse instructional methods, and more stakeholder decision-making authority. The current factory model system must be replaced by a learning organization system. Three critical components of a comprehensive reform plan include creating a vision, developing and linking policies, and laying out implementation strategies. New policies should create new academic standards, align curriculum and assessments with the new standards, create environments supporting reform, hold schools and districts accountable for results, transform professional development, involve the public, engage higher education's participation, reshape education finance, provide incentives for interagency cooperation, and restructure the state education agency. Although many states are working on systematic change, no state has put all the elements together. (MLH)

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# INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMIC EDUCATION REFORM

Restructuring the Education System

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## DEAR FRIENDS:



During the past year, representatives of the Education Commission of the States, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business

Roundtable, National Governors' Association and the U.S. Department of Education met informally and regularly to talk about our various national reform initiatives.

We were pleased, and somewhat surprised, to find remarkable consistency about what principles should guide reform efforts, what reforms are needed, what types of policies will support them and what strategies will bring them about (see box on "Points of Consensus" on page 4). Overall, we agreed that schools need to expect much more of all students and that it will take a radically different education system to accomplish this. No single program or project, no single school or district, will overcome problems that stem from how the education system is organized and operated.

### Taking on the System

We must take a systemic approach to improving education. This means taking a comprehensive, coordinated, long-term approach aimed at changing the entire education system, not just pieces of it. It means developing policies to support real change and creating strategies for getting there.

Throughout the 1980s and into the '90s, we have seen an unprecedented amount of reform legislation, strong reform leadership from numerous governors, an explosion of business-education partnerships, a booming business in new curriculum, assessment and instructional materials, and the appearance of dozens of school reform and restructuring networks.

Talk about reform, restructuring and fundamental change is now at an all-time high.

Yet much of this reform activity has been piecemeal and without widespread impact on student learning. Policy making, slowed by single-issue bargaining and partisan bickering, all too often has been incremental and reactive — more likely to support the status quo than to make fundamental change.

Experience shows that the overall education system discourages innovation, prevents successes from spreading and slows change to a crawl. The high mobility of students and educators in and out of the system further complicates efforts to improve.

Widespread reform will occur only if it is encouraged by a coherent policy environment that explicitly supports fundamental change and unleashes the imagination and energy of students, teachers, parents and community leaders — the only people who can really make it happen.

This is not an easy or quick task, but it is a necessary one. This publication discusses what changing an education system means. It provides an overview of what is involved and what policy direction will improve our education system. Other publications in this series look in more detail at individual aspects of a comprehensive reform plan, including building coalitions to support reform, communicating and creating visions and standards. They also examine the policies states and districts need to address to reform their education systems. I believe the ideas in these publications will move us closer to delivering on the promises of reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. McKernan, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style.

John R. McKernan, Jr.  
Governor of Maine  
1991-92 ECS Chairman

## What Is Involved?

To prepare students well for the 21st century, our education system requires:

- An interdisciplinary environment that challenges the way we organize classrooms, subjects and knowledge in schools and colleges
- A curriculum that stresses lifelong skills such as learning how to learn instead of rote learning
- Teachers who take on different roles — not only lecturing, but also coaching, role playing, facilitating
- An environment that encourages students to take more responsibility for their learning, becoming active participants instead of passive recipients of information
- Improved forms of assessment, including portfolios, exhibitions and demonstrations
- Creative use of time and space
- More individualized instruction, i.e., methods that respond to students' individual learning styles
- More diverse ways of organizing and presenting information
- More decision-making autonomy given to those persons closest to the problems

Creating such an environment is complicated. One level of the education system affects the next: teachers work within schools, schools operate within districts, districts work under the umbrella of state policy. In addition, our education system has many interlocking components — curriculum, finance, teacher development, use of time and space and assessment. What happens in one area affects the others.

Current policy supports an environment designed to teach the top one-third of students to think and the rest to do. This focus and organization is wrong for the work force of the 21st century and wrong for the kind of learning environment students need today. The current "factory model" system needs to be replaced by a "learning organization" system like that described in the box below.

## Changing the System

The education system is not an abstract machine. It is people. To change a system is to change what those people value, where they think they are headed, what they talk about, how they talk to one another and what they do day-to-day. It is to change the policies that give the system direction, and the rules and regulations that specify how individuals work and what they work on. It is to change how

the system is managed and how it inspires or crushes initiative and creativity. It is to create new incentives and disincentives, new norms, new "cultures," new forms of leadership. In short, it is to change **every aspect** of the system.

*Every member of the education system must take on these tasks — teachers and principals in the schools; local board members and administrators in the district; state board members and chief state school officers; legislators and governors at the state level.*

## Components of a Coherent Reform Plan

There are three critical components of a comprehensive reform plan: (1) *create a vision*, (2) *develop and link policies* and (3) *lay out strategies for implementation*.

### 1. Create a Vision

Systemic change begins with a clear sense of what students should know and be able to do when they leave school. It springs from compelling images of what better schools and education systems are like (e.g., different teaching styles, a variety of assessments, support for innovation) and from intense community discussions about how to get there and what the costs will be if we don't. It must encompass new, higher standards for everyone in the system. What should teachers do to help students succeed? What is the role of administrators and school boards? (See *Creating Visions and Standards To Support Them*, also in this series, for more information.)

	<b>FACTORY MODEL</b> Existing	<b>LEARNING ORGANIZATION</b> Desired
<b>COMMUNITY RESPONSIVENESS</b>	Closed to community around it; unable to be responsive	Open to community around it; able to learn, change with the times
<b>PLANNING</b>	Highly centralized planning	Planning distributed widely through all levels of the system
<b>DECISION MAKING</b>	Top-down command and control	Shared decision making
<b>KNOWLEDGE FLOW</b>	Organizational knowledge bottled up, fragmented among "experts"	Knowledge flows throughout the system
<b>INNOVATION</b>	Low priority on innovation and questioning	High priority on innovation and questioning
<b>TEACHERS' ROLE</b>	Teachers viewed as deliverers of knowledge	Teachers viewed as facilitators of learning
<b>VALUES</b>	Little conversation about values, purposes and norms; little chance of changing them	Constant exploration of values, purposes, norms and a capacity to change them
<b>MANAGEMENT STYLE</b>	Managers see job as telling others what to do, assessing performance	Managers see job as raising questions, facilitating discussion, listening
<b>RESOURCE USE</b>	Human and material resources spent largely on disputes, reinvention, quick fixes, circumvention, interest-group deadlock	Human and material resources devoted to sharing, invention, creative and critical thinking, accountability, reflection, learning — among both adults and students

## 2. Develop and Link Policies

Systemic change requires integrating policies that support creative learning environments. Such policies should:

- **Create new standards for what students should know and be able to do.** These standards should emphasize higher-order learning and be shared by everyone involved, from community members to state policy leaders.
- **Develop frameworks and guidelines to link curriculum to the new standards.** Expectations for what students should know and be able to do should cross subject areas and support active learning, not passive memorization, and critical thinking.
- **Develop assessments that are tied to the new standards and which reinforce the curriculum.** Assessment efforts should measure the knowledge and skills called for and include a variety of approaches, including exhibitions, portfolios and other forms of performance assessment.
- **Create environments that allow and support reform.** Regulations that inhibit or prevent reform should be waived until policies are reshaped. Incentives should encourage schools and districts to restructure and be innovative. Schools should have the latitude to make critical decisions about hiring, allocation of resources, modes of in-

struction, scheduling and other such issues.

- **Hold schools and districts accountable for results.** Success should be measured by student performance/outcomes rather than number of days spent in class or compliance with regulations. Assessment results should be public, and schools that consistently fail to improve student achievement should receive both sanctions and extensive assistance.
- **Transform professional development.** Professional development efforts should include helping teachers and principals understand the demands of restructuring and improve their ability to teach in new ways to new standards. Teacher education should ensure that newly graduated teachers can be part of the change process. The teacher certification process, too, should reflect new, higher expectations and standards with alternative routes to certification considered.
- **Involve the public.** Parents and business/public coalitions should be involved in every aspect of education system reform. Parents should be welcomed into schools as part of decision-making teams.
- **Engage higher education's participation.** Undergraduate education, including admissions standards, should reflect higher expectations for students in grades K-12 and for prospective teachers.

Colleges and universities should work as partners with schools to support restructuring.

- **Reshape education finance.** Finance decisions should focus on the needs of students, not the maintenance of organizations, and should be made in light of the dual goals of equity and improved performance. Financial incentives should support innovation and collaboration among schools and colleges.
- **Provide incentives for health, social and youth service agencies to work with schools and with one another.** Social agencies can help parents with prenatal care and parenting skills to assure that children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn. Quality preschool opportunities also benefit young children.
- **Restructure the state education agency.** People working in the state department of education should be engaged in the work of redesigning their roles and responsibilities in a restructured system.



## POINTS OF CONSENSUS

- We need much higher expectations of students and their schools.
- We know what works, but we are doing it only on a small scale.
- We must understand and agree on where we are going, why and how.
- We must ensure that policies and programs support learning and are linked to one another.
- We should encourage each state to cultivate a critical mass of schools and districts trying to restructure themselves.
- We need a change of attitude and behavior on the part of the American people if we are to succeed in improving the education system.

## WHY CHANGE?

- Students are more diverse, troubled and unevenly prepared than in the past. Nearly one in four 6-year-olds lives in poverty; 23% of children live in single-parent families; 20% of all high school seniors have used an illegal drug in the last month.
- Economic and technological changes require citizens to have a much higher level of literacy than in the past.
- Current teaching practice is inconsistent with research about how people learn.
- There is persistent evidence that large numbers of students cannot remember, understand or apply their knowledge.
- Current administrative practice in education systems often is out of synch with trends in organizational management toward decentralization of authority, shared decision making and empowerment of the front-line worker, in this case, the teacher.

Another ECS publication in this series, *Bringing Coherence to State Policy*, expands on the above points.

### 3. Lay out strategies for implementation and enlist groups to carry them out

- Build business/community coalitions to provide continuity through changes of leadership, maintain fidelity to the vision and serve as a sounding board for integrating new ideas (see *Building Private Sector and Community Support* for more information).
- Create a communications strategy to explain the need for reform, stimulate broad public debate of the options and keep the public part of the reform process (see *Communication*).
- Review existing policies to see which hurt and which help reform

efforts and make appropriate policy adjustments.

- Establish benchmarks for the progress of reform and then track your progress.

### Conclusion

Elements of a systemic approach to school change are emerging. President Bush, the 50 governors and numerous leaders in education and business have set national goals and called for higher standards. States such as California, Connecticut, Maine and Vermont have begun the process of developing new visions of a better education system. States such as Kentucky, Oregon and South Carolina have begun bold policy efforts to bring about comprehensive change in how they educate their students.

Colorado, Maine and Michigan are among states that have established broad public/private coalitions to coordinate reform efforts, showcase innovation and lead the public debate about new, higher standards.

But no state yet has put all the elements together. We have the tools and information we need to create a new, dynamic education system. Now it is time to take the best thinking reformers and educators have to offer and put it together in a package that will result in an education system that can deliver on the promise of reform.



### SYSTEMIC CHANGE MEANS . . .

- A common vision
- High standards stated in terms of desired results
- Coherent, integrated policies
- A long-term perspective
- Implementing even incremental change in the context of a comprehensive strategy

### SYSTEMIC CHANGE DOES NOT MEAN . . .

- Education systems and schools that look alike
- Loss of local control over critical educational decisions
- Simultaneous development and funding of all the pieces in a reform strategy
- Ignoring special student needs
- Starting over — a systems change strategy can be built upon current efforts.

This publication is part of an ECS series called *Restructuring the Education System* (SI-92-1P). Publications include:

- *Introduction to Systemic Education Reform* — Examines the rationale for and components of a systemic approach to education reform (SI-92-1) \$3
- *Building Private Sector and Community Support* — Defines the role of public/private coalitions needed to lead the call for a new education system (SI-92-2) \$4
- *Creating Visions and Standards To Support Them* — Examines the importance of having a vision for a new education system and presents suggestions on how to use the vision/standard-setting process to move reform forward (SI-92-3) \$4

- *Bringing Coherence to State Policy* — Describes problems with traditional education reform policy and presents a guide to creating policy that supports widespread education reform (SI-92-4) \$4

The four publications listed above are available as a packet for \$12. Individual publications may be ordered for the amounts listed in the descriptions of each.

Other ECS publications about restructuring the education system include:

- *A Consumer's Guide, Volume 1* — Answers common questions about restructuring and provides brief overviews of 10 major initiatives (SI-91-4) \$8
- *Communication* — Provides tips on building support for restructuring through effective communication strategies and skills (SI-91-5) \$4

- *Communicating About Restructuring - Kit* — Contains how-to's and examples of successful communication tools and strategies (SI-91-6) \$20
- *School Restructuring: What the Reformers Are Saying* — Summarizes a lengthy discussion among nationally recognized education reformers (SI-91-8) \$5

To order any of the above publications, contact the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; 303-299-3692. Checks and purchase orders only; no credit card orders.

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The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels.

Forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS offices are at 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427.

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**T. MacArthur Foundation and the UNUM Life Insurance Company for their support of these publications.**

**Maine Governor John R. McKernan, Jr.**, 1991-92 ECS chairman, is a leading advocate for education reform in Maine and New England. As Maine's first Republican governor in two decades, his tenure has been marked by new initiatives designed to expand opportunities for non-college-bound youth, increase accountability and strengthen curriculum. His leadership won recognition for Maine in 1989 as National Alliance of Business

"State of the Year" for human resource initiatives.

A Bangor native who graduated from Dartmouth college and the University of Maine School of Law, McKernan also chairs the National Governors' Association Committee on Human Resources and the Jobs for America's graduates program. Previously, he served two terms as Maine's representative in the U.S. Congress, where he served on the House Education and Labor Committee.