EDUCATION STANDARDS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
A BIBLIOGRAPHY

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As a participant-observer of school reform during this current fifteen-year focus on educational change, I believe that we have been evolving a new kind of Education in our society. That is, our expectations for education were relatively simple and straightforward when we developed our Common Schools through the middle of the nineteenth century, centers of rudimentary learning and small-scale socialization to prepare an agricultural people for participation in a political democracy. Turn of the century industrialization and urbanization altered our sense of what schools should do -- specifically the preparation of youth for economic participation in an industrial economy, and we expanded and routinized education to accommodate our nation's modernization. While we didn't realize it in the rhetoric accompanying release of the “Nation at Risk” report in 1983, initiating this period of reform, we were beginning a paradigmatic change in our conceptions of Education, as a result of similarly revolutionary changes in our economy. We are no longer either an agricultural, or an industrial people; instead, we are ushering in the Information Age we anticipated theoretically, but had not yet realized in fact.

The implications for Education, of political participation and powering our economy in a new, information-based and service-responsive society are considerable. We need all our citizens to think in substantive and multivariate ways; and work with each other in new and diverse arrangements, with new products and new kinds of tools, and in new media.

Assuring ourselves that our young people are being prepared for their -- and our -- shared future has taken the form of standards-setting in core content knowledge in the subject-matter disciplinary associations and the professional pedagogical associations, adopted variously in 49 of the 50 states.

Just as new national Goals for Education had been put in regulation by Congress in 1990, during the Bush Administration and a new, bi-partisan, National Panel charged with monitoring our progress on their achievement, the centerpiece Education legislation of the Clinton Administration, Goals 2000: Educate America Act, required states to set content and performance standards for American students, and develop assessments aligned with them.

Although some of us are impatient with the slow pace of change, we have come quite far in reconceptualizing American education. The trajectory of reform, as well as continuing bi-partisan state and federal support, assures the “sticking power” of Education Standards as a vehicle for the fundamental re-formation of American Education. From a period of reform that was primarily reactive, and characterized by rigor -- “toughening up” and “tightening up” schooling as we have developed it this century, we have created a new kind of education whose primary focus is teaching and learning to meet public expectations for excellence. From a modern education focused primarily on in-puts, we have moved to accountability expectations based on outputs -- student achievement.
But we have much to do. Specifically, the unfinished agenda of this multi-year, multi-million dollar investment in changing American education is rooted in the removal of two parts of the proposed Goals 2000 legislation, excised by Congress prior to passage: a mechanism for reviewing states’ standards and “certifying” their quality; and a requirement that states simultaneously define students’ “Opportunities to Learn” what we are saying we want them to know.

The unhappy effect of new requirements for students’ learning without concomitant commitment to providing requisite support for that achievement -- specifically the preparation and re-education of teachers to teach in a standards-based educational environment, is that we are setting new, high expectations for students’ achievement, without a care for how they will get there. We must use the same government levers for change which have effectively altered how states understand what students “should know and be able to do” to effect similar change in what teachers should “know and be able to do.” Although many “standards” for teachers have been proposed or advocated -- and, indeed, NCATE (university teacher education program accrediting unit), INTASC (interstate collaboration of states’ Departments of Education for teacher licensure), and the NBPTS (new national Board for professional certification) all have “standards” for their work -- they are neither aligned among themselves, nor connected to the standards set for students. They should be.

In the absence of any public review of states’ standards-setting -- on any dimension -- we lack accountability in the states about the worth of the standards they have set. More critically, it is becoming clear that states developed new “high stakes” tests apart from their educational standards-setting -- relying, variously, on assessment personnel in states’ Departments of Education to formulate an assessment linked to the states’ standards; employing consultants to analyze states’ student learning standards and develop a test aligned with them; or counting on purveyors of large-scale norm-referenced tests to measure students’ knowledge. There is no published evidence -- from any state -- that their new assessments are actually aligned with the states’ expectations for student learnings. Because these new assessments are so important, however, there is growing evidence that teachers -- unprepared for new kinds of instruction to realize new expectations for their students’ learning -- are simply teaching to the tests. (Which assessments may merely measure rudimentary learning rather than the complex knowledge and understanding now called for. Though I am hopeful that the 1994 ESEA Reauthorization requirements for Title I, demanding aligned assessments, will spur richer and fuller measurement of the necessary learning states have specified.) Moreover, we have done nothing to anticipate diverse student responses for meeting specified standards -- neither taking account of cognitive and affective research, nor considering individual disabilities.

Our country’s commitment to equity and opportunity in realizing our educational ideal -- democratic participation and economic viability -- requires that we take seriously the remaining agenda of our standards-based reform effort, assuring parents and our communities that we are preparing, inducting, and supporting excellent teachers who can teach students in the new ways they are being expected to learn and achieve, and, also, ensuring that the assessments we develop truly measure what we wish them to, capturing the unique, creative, synthetic, and productive learning our students can contribute to our shared future.

Our expectations for accountability cannot be met until teacher preparation and the assessment of students’ learning are as useful, meaningful, and expansive as the standards we have set to define the educational excellence we want.
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