

## A Summary of Key National Educational Reform Agendas

**Education Reform is not a new enterprise for Americans. The following summary of key national reform agendas over the last 100+ years is provided to illustrate the nature of America's evolving vision of what schools need to be doing and how teachers need to be educated.**

In the late 1800s, traditional educators saw high school as a college preparatory institution. This divided students into academic versus terminal students, often based on economic, social, and ethnic backgrounds. Others believed the high school should serve more as a people's school, offering a range of practical courses. In 1892, the National Education Association established the Committee of Ten, chaired by Charles Eliot, to develop a national policy for high schools. In its report, the committee acknowledged the terminal as well as the college preparatory function of the high school, but recommend that the terminal students be given the same program as those who were headed for college. Among other things, this group advocated sequential courses and that each course meet four to five times weekly over the school year to be worth one Carnegie unit.

In 1918 the Seven Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education were announced by a committee of the National Educational Association (the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education). The focus of this commission was to form objectives for a high school education that would be ones final level of education. Changes were needed because of increased enrollment in high schools. A new focus that took into account individual differences, goals, attitudes, and abilities was adopted. The concept of democracy was decided on as the guide of education in America. The seven Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education were identified as: health, worthy home membership, command of fundamental academic skills, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time and ethical character.

In 1957 the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. This launch played a significant role in educational reform. For the public, it symbolized a threat to American security and to our superiority in science and technology. As a result, educators, scientists, and mathematicians broadened and accelerated educational reform, the public understood and supported the effort, and the policy makers increased federal funding. What is sometimes referred to as the "Golden Age" of science and mathematics education began in the 1950s with development of new programs that eventually became known by their acronyms (e.g. the Physical Science Study Committee, known as PSSC Physics; the Chemical Education Materials Study, known as Chem Study; the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, known as BSCS biology; the Earth Sciences Curriculum Project, known as ESCP earth science. At the elementary level, there was the Elementary Science Study, known as ESS; the Science Curriculum Improvement Study, known as SCIS, and Science-A Process Approach, known as S-APA).

Mortimer Adler, in his controversial Paideia Proposal (1982), advocated a required course of study that was the same for every child through the first 12 years of schooling. He believed that allowing electives only let students "voluntarily downgrade their own education." His biggest concern was the inability of the educational system to teach children to think (as opposed to memorizing a string of mind-numbing facts). To accomplish this goal he, along with education professionals, developed a program based on the Socratic method of teaching.

The report "A Place Called School" (1983) by John Goodlad is part of an account of the largest on-the-scene study of U.S. schools ever undertaken. The report recommends a greater variety of teaching methods to deal with student diversity, grouping students in clusters rather than by grade level, and making the principal a manager and NOT the instructional leader. The study based on these recommendations was carried on over 4 years. To gather data trained investigators went into more than 1,000 classrooms in 38 elementary and secondary schools in seven different sections of the United States. These schools were located in urban, rural, and suburban areas. The investigators talked to teachers, students, administrators, school boards, parents, and members of the community.

In 1983 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a national panel of educators and citizens (chaired by Ernest Boyer), recommended a heavy emphasis on English, a strong academic core for all students. It recommendations include the elimination of vocational tracks and advocacy for a 5-year teacher education program. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is a national and international center for research and policy studies about teaching. Chartered in 1906 by an Act of Congress, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is an independent policy and research center whose charge is "to do and perform all things necessary to encourage, uphold, and dignify the profession of the teacher and the cause of higher education." Many of its reports and surveys are available online.

Containing powerful rhetoric, such as America's schools "being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity" and by doing nothing we were committing "an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament", the report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), mobilized governors, state legislators and educators to seriously consider educational reform. The message shocked the nation. "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." Articulating a series of "indicators of risk," the Commission established to study the American educational system made a large number of recommendations. President Ronald Reagan accepted the report but largely ignored its contents. The term "at risk children" has become a common denominator in educational dialogue today. The report stated that "disturbing inadequacies" existed in areas such as: non-challenging secondary school curricula, low teacher expectations of students; inadequate homework requirements; ineffective use of classroom time; and textbooks that had been "written down."

Based on detailed interviews and observations in 15 secondary schools across the country, "Horace's Compromise" (1984) by Theodore Sizer emphasized the need to develop close teacher-student relationships, high student motivation, and a less fragmented curriculum. Only certain essentials such as literacy, numeric ability, and civic understanding should be mandated. As the Chairman of the Coalition of Essential Schools, Sizer's emphasis is on school reform. The Coalition emphasizes that reform is a two-step process. "The first step is to rethink how the school is designed and then rearrange the design to make possible better work. The second step is to shape teaching practices that make it possible for all students to use their minds well."

In 1986 two reports called for "more rigorous" education levels for practicing and beginning teachers. The report "A Nation Prepared" called for the establishment of a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards to test and certify working, on-the-job, teachers who already had licensure and to issue an advanced teaching certificate. It recommended that all beginning teachers take a 5-year teacher education program including 4 years of liberal arts and science. A 14-member panel of educators, policy makers, and politicians wrote the report. Thirteen education deans and one college president wrote the second report "Tomorrow's Teachers - The Holmes Report". This report called for greater recognition of teaching and improvement of teachers' working conditions while advocating that all beginning teachers be required to receive a bachelor's degree in an academic field and a master's degree in education.

Goals 2000: the Educate America Act was signed into law in 1994. The goals were first discussed in 1991 and they became a political consensus among the governors and President Bush. The six original goals would become eight. These goals were as follows: "By the Year 2000 - 1) All children in America will start school ready to learn. 2) The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent. 3) All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy. 4) United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement. 5) Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. 6) Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. 7) The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century. 8) Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children."

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools. President George W. Bush describes this law as the "cornerstone of my administration." Clearly, our children are our future, and, as President Bush has expressed, "Too many of our neediest children are being left behind." It is built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results; an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility.