

April 15, 2014

To: CSLS Seminararians

**How to Build an Education Justice Movement: A Hypothesis, and First Steps**

The following pages contain an excerpt from, *For Each & Every Child: A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence* (Edley, Cuellar, *et al.*, 2013) [report of the National Commission on Education Equity and Excellence). There follows an excerpt from a pending grant proposal, which describes an experimental strategy for building an education equity movement.

I look forward to your thoughts on this venture.

■ Chris Edley

FOR  
EACH  
AND  
EVERY  
CHILD

A STRATEGY  
FOR EDUCATION  
EQUITY AND  
EXCELLENCE

**The Honorable Arne Duncan**

U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202-0001

**Dear Secretary Duncan:**

The members of the commission respectfully hereby submit this report for your review and consideration. This report reflects the consensus of the commission. It does not reflect the full scope of each commission member's views with respect to the issues discussed in the report. To elaborate on some of the dialogue and ideas discussed by this commission, a number of us have submitted, and some have collaborated upon, independently authored materials for a compendium which can be found in Appendix C.

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## Foreword by the Commission Co-Chairs

by Christopher Edley, Jr. and Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar

This report summarizes how America’s K-12 education system, taken as a whole, fails our nation and too many of our children. Our system does not distribute opportunity equitably. Our leaders decry but tolerate disparities in student outcomes that are not only unfair, but socially and economically dangerous. Our nation’s stated commitments to academic excellence are often eloquent but, without more, an insufficient response to challenges at home and globally. The data the commission reviewed make clear that officials, administrators and constituents at all levels of government must attack our education failings as a moral and economic imperative.

What steps must we take in the years to come, and toward what ultimate destination? The direction of school reformers over the past 30 years has been guided by the polestar of world-class standards and test-based accountability. Our country’s effort to move in this direction has indeed led to important progress. But it has not been enough. The next stage of our journey will require coordinated reform efforts in all the states, and their 15,000 school districts, together with federal agencies—efforts focused on laying the foundations for far more widespread and equitable opportunities for students throughout the nation. Out of many efforts, one united effort can create the opportunity that should be the birthright of each and every American child.

The commission’s report provides a five-part framework of tightly interrelated recommendations to guide policymaking:

- **Equitable School Finance** systems so that a child’s critical opportunities are not a function of his or her zip code;
- **Teachers, Principals and Curricula** effective enough to provide children with the opportunity to thrive in a changing world;
- **Early Childhood Education** with an academic focus, to narrow the disparities in readiness when kids reach kindergarten;
- **Mitigating Poverty’s Effects** with broad access not only to early childhood education, but also to a range of support services necessary to promote student success and family engagement in school; effective measures to improve outcomes for student groups especially likely to be left behind—including English-language learners, children in Indian country or isolated rural areas, children with special education needs, and those involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems; and
- **Accountability and Governance** reforms to make clearer who is responsible for what, attach consequences to performance, and ensure that national commitments to equity and excellence are reflected in results on the ground, not just in speeches during campaigns.

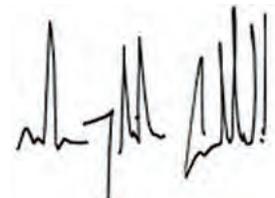
For most of our nation’s history, earnest and knowledgeable Americans have debated how to approach our education system and have called for reforms of every description. We’ve debated what to teach and how to teach; what standards to set; how best to train teachers and the basis on which to judge them; the role of testing, what kind of tests should be required, and how often they should be administered; the effects of tracking, homework and social promotion, and of charter schools and vouchers; how to provide adequate and equitable funding; and the role of the federal government, governors, mayors, superintendents, school boards—and teachers, principals, and parents—in school reform. As the adults fight, the children lose.

This Commission, composed of a diverse group from many different backgrounds, each with his or her own experience, ideas and responsibilities, each representing a perspective in the nation’s ongoing conversation about schools, does not agree on all the myriad issues in those debates. But after listening to scores of educators, scholars and advocates, examining volumes of research reports and other data, and debating fundamental issues for the past two years, we have come to broad agreement on the underlying problems, and on fundamental principles and the policies needed to solve them.

The situation is dire, the agenda urgent. From parent associations to Capitol Hill, from classroom teachers to the White House—there is work to be done and passion to be spent by all of us who appreciate the stakes for our children and for the nation’s future. If we fail in this work, we will forfeit our position of economic and moral leadership. We will risk the future of our people and of America as we know it.



Christopher Edley, Jr.  
**Co-Chair**—The Equity and  
Excellence Commission



Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar  
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# Introduction

Education is the key to a strong democracy, economic competitiveness and a world-class standard of living. In recent decades, however, America has lost its place as a global leader in educational attainment in ways that will lead to a decline in living standards for millions of our children and the loss of trillions of dollars of economic growth.

While some young Americans—most of them white and affluent—are getting a truly world-class education, those who attend schools in high poverty neighborhoods are getting an education that more closely approximates school in developing nations. In reading, for example, although U.S. children in low-poverty schools rank at the top of the world, those in our highest-poverty schools are performing on a par with children in the world’s lowest-achieving countries.<sup>1</sup> With the highest poverty rate in the developed world,<sup>2</sup> amplified by the inadequate education received by many children in low-income schools, the United States is threatening its own future.

A recent McKinsey report, for example, concluded that the inequities within the U.S. education system impose an economic impact on the country equivalent to a “permanent national recession.”<sup>3</sup> To achieve the excellence and equity in education on which our future depends, we need a system of American public education that ensures all students have a real and meaningful opportunity to achieve rigorous college- and career-ready standards. A world-class education consists not solely of mastery of core subjects, but also of training in critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as in 21st-century concerns like global awareness and financial literacy. Such high levels of education are key to self-reliance and economic security in a world where education matters more than ever for the success of societies as well as individuals.

But American schools must do more than ensure our future economic prosperity; they must foster the nation’s civic culture and sense of common purpose, and create the unified nation that *e pluribus unum* celebrates. So much depends on fulfilling this mission: the shared ideals that enable our governmental system to hold together even in the face of fractious political disagreements; the strength of our diversity; the domestic tranquility that our Constitution promises; and the ability to maintain the influence—as example and power—that America has long projected in the world. We neglect those expectations at our peril.

We cannot have a strong democracy without an informed, engaged citizenry. Accordingly, a strong public school system is essential to a strong democracy. Public schools must be

strengthened to tackle two uniquely 21st-century challenges. First, although the United States has many first-rate schools, even our top students don’t perform as well as top students in many other countries in mathematics.<sup>4</sup> Second, the schools serving high concentrations of low-income students and students of color are at far higher risk of leaving their students unprepared for work and life in an era of global competition than are their white and middle-class peers.<sup>5</sup> An additional challenge is that reform efforts to date have been poorly targeted.

The truth is that in an era when work can be organized and carried out anywhere on the planet, we have failed to confront the price of these two gaps. There is no doubt that excellence and equity are vital to produce the additional 20 million postsecondary graduates by 2025 necessary to grow a 21st-century economy. Equity is a key strategy needed to shore up the entire nation’s standing in the global economy; we cannot compete successfully with one arm tied behind our back. Any goal of competitiveness and excellence must start with equity or be doomed to fail. Equally important, the weave of America’s social and moral fabric now includes powerful commitments to broad inclusion and universal opportunity. These values are self-evidently fundamental. They are not, however, well served by our education system.

In this introductory section, we pinpoint two problems in our education system. As we do, we reveal a shocking picture of how the situation hurts our children’s lives and, in turn, the nation. Then we outline the five major elements of an equity and excellence agenda that we believe can surmount this challenge.

## Finding the Solution to America’s Achievement Gaps

Today, far too many U.S. students—the future labor force—are no longer competitive with students across the developed world. In the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings for 2009, the United States was 27<sup>th</sup> in math (not counting states or provinces that were ranked separately from their country).<sup>6</sup> In terms of “advanced” performance on math, 16 countries produced twice as many high-achievers per capita as the United States. Indeed, in mathematics, only one in four of

America's 52 million K-12 students is performing on par today with the average student in the highest-performing school systems in the world—which are now in Singapore, Hong Kong, Finland, Taiwan and South Korea.<sup>7</sup> If we accept this level of performance, we will find our economy on a low-growth path, because over the past half-century, the economies of countries with higher math and science skills have grown faster than those with lower-skilled populations.<sup>8</sup> We will also erode our country's ability to deliver on its promise of equal opportunity for all its people.

Imagine what we could achieve if we made American public schools competitive with those of a higher-performing country such as Canada in mathematics (which means scoring approximately 40 points higher on PISA tests) over the next 20 years. As our higher-skill-level students entered the labor force, they would produce a faster-growing economy. How much faster? The potential is stunning. The improvement in our GDP over the next 80 years would exceed a present value of \$70 trillion.<sup>9</sup> That's equivalent to an average 20 percent boost in income for every U.S. worker each year over his or her entire career. This would generate enough revenue to solve the U.S. debt problem that is the object of so much current debate.

While the exact level of U.S. performance as compared to other countries may vary somewhat across international assessments,<sup>11</sup> what remains clear is the nation continues to face a significant problem of inequality. We face this challenge as our public schools undertake to educate an enormously diverse student population in a country with rapidly changing demographics. In 2009, more than 39 percent of our public school students were African American or Hispanic—up from 33 percent just a decade earlier. In 11 states, non-Hispanic white students were already a minority, a trend that is likely to continue as the Hispanic populations in a number of states continue to rise.<sup>12</sup>

Yet when it comes to our country's ability to close the achievement gap between students from different demographic groups, our record is dismal. In math, the average African American eighth-grader is performing at the 19<sup>th</sup> percentile of white students.<sup>13</sup> The average Hispanic student is at the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile. In this age in which skills are dominant in the labor market, we are relegating a large and growing portion of our population to bleak economic futures. Concerns about disparities in income distribution will, with these basic realities, be an ever-present element of the U.S. future. The opposite side of the same coin is the huge loss to the American economy and to our future economic well-being from failing to develop fully the human potential of our population.

Consider, for example, the consequences of addressing the achievement gap between white students, on the one hand, and African American and Hispanic students, on the other. If, on average, African American and Hispanic students performed academically at the level currently achieved by white students, overall student performance for the United States would rise from below the developed-country average to a respectable position

### English-Language Learner Students

More than 20 percent of school-age children speak a language other than English at home.<sup>14</sup> From the 1997–98 school year to the 2008–09 school year, the number of English-language learners (ELLs) enrolled in public schools increased by 51 percent.<sup>15</sup>

The diversity of ELLs, with respect to their places of origin, socioeconomic status and language, presents unique opportunities for the United States. In an increasingly global economy, these young people could be our strategic advantage.

But ELL children also present unique challenges. Many of our teachers, for example, speak only English and have no training in how to respond to the needs of those still learning the language. Further, in some schools and classrooms, there are many languages represented, complicating instruction enormously. Some ELLs, though not all, were born outside of the United States, and immigrant children are significantly more likely to live in poverty and lag in academic achievement.<sup>16</sup>

Although ELLs face many of the challenges outlined in this report—including being more likely to attend segregated and under-resourced schools, thereby limiting their access to higher-quality, specialized instruction—this commission report does not address the plethora of issues that are specifically related to the experience of ELLs in public schools. These issues include: the best and most appropriate method to provide language and content instruction to ELLs according to their grade level and resources available in the school; the need for testing and evaluation instruments that fairly and adequately measure progress on language and core curriculum; the best teacher and principal training and development to ensure a supportive and successful environment for ELLs; the appropriate and fair identification mechanisms for ELL status; the best and most successful approaches in early childhood education to prepare ELLs for primary and secondary education; the best mechanisms to identify ELLs with special needs to ensure provision of appropriate services; the best practices in parental education and involvement; and the best mechanisms to develop and maintain academic fluency in students' first language in recognition of the value of multilingual fluency to the national workforce and economy.

Although these ELL-specific issues proved beyond the scope of this commission's report, these issues are critical to the success of the overall equity and excellence agenda—particularly in light of the substantial and continuing growth of the ELL student population in all regions of the nation—and deserve separate and further evaluation.

ahead, for example, of Australia and Germany. If Hispanic and African American student performance grew to be comparable to white performance and remained there over the next 80 years, the historical evidence indicates that the impact would be staggering—adding some \$50 trillion (in present value terms) to our economy.<sup>18</sup> This amount constitutes more than three times the size of our current GDP and represents the income that we forgo by not ensuring equity for all of our students. In fact, simply achieving a 90 percent graduation rate for students of color would add as

much as \$6.6 billion in annual earnings to the American economy.<sup>19</sup>

Our education system, legally desegregated more than a half century ago, is ever more segregated by wealth and income, and often again by race. Ten million students in America's poorest communities<sup>20</sup>—and millions more African American, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native students who are not poor—are having their lives unjustly and irredeemably blighted by a system that consigns them to the lowest-performing teachers, the most run-down facilities, and academic expectations and opportunities considerably lower than what we expect of other students. These vestiges of segregation, discrimination and inequality are unfinished business for our nation.

Admittedly, many of these disadvantaged students enter school far behind their more advantaged peers. But instead of getting deadly serious about remedying that fact—by making sure such students are in high-quality early childhood and pre-K programs, attend schools staffed with teachers and leaders who have the skills and knowledge to help each student reach high standards, get after-school counseling or tutorial assistance or the eyeglasses they need to see the smart board—the current American system exacerbates the problem by giving these children less of everything that makes a difference in education. As a result, we take the extraordinary diversity—including linguistic backgrounds and familial relationships—that should be our strategic advantage in the international economy and squander it.

Given that low-income students, English-language learners and students of color together form a majority of our young people and the fastest-growing population in the nation—and that America's future economic and civic vitality depends on their success in an age of global competition—this practice is not only unjust but also unwise.

### **An Unfinished Reform Agenda**

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* famously spoke of the “rising tide of mediocrity” that threatened our schools. Nearly 30 years later, the tide has come in—and we're drowning. Since that landmark report, we've had five “education presidents” and dozens of “education governors” who have championed higher standards, innovative schools, better teaching, rigorous curricula, tougher testing and other education reforms. And, to be sure, there has been important progress. Reading and math performance levels in our elementary schools, for example, have improved in recent years, as has mathematics performance in our middle schools.

Except in a few states, however, the incremental steps we have taken have not been enough to keep pace with the dramatic improvement other nations have made in their school systems. Moreover, any honest assessment must acknowledge that our efforts to date to confront the vast gaps in educational outcomes separating different groups of young Americans have yet to include a serious and sustained commitment to ending the appalling inequities—in school funding, in early education, in teacher quality, in resources for teachers and students and in governance—that

### **Students with Disabilities**

Some 13 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary students are receiving special education services.<sup>21</sup> Of these students, the largest portions have specific learning disabilities and speech/language disabilities, although the numbers with an autism spectrum disorder have shown the fastest growth over the past decade.

Even though the education of students with special needs has been the focus of federal law and policy for more than four decades, the performance by students receiving special education has unfortunately not been good. Fourth-grade students with disabilities scored at *proficient* levels of attainment or higher on the 2011 reading and math portions of the National Assessment of Educational Progress at less than half the rates of students without disabilities.<sup>22</sup> In addition, students with disabilities have substantially higher dropout and lower graduation rates than students without disabilities.<sup>23</sup>

Historically, even though legal attention to these students has highlighted issues surrounding the schooling process, students with disabilities frequently have had special problems gaining full access to schools' general education curriculum; are often placed in separate classrooms for more than 20 percent of the school day;<sup>24</sup> are suspended at disproportionately high rates; often lack teachers who are dual-certified in a content area; and do not receive appropriate instructional differentiation aligned with their disabilities.

But there are signs that with recent federally initiated accountability measures, including those brought forth by No Child Left Behind, state and local programs have begun to move from process issues to concerns about educational outcomes. We strongly support an increased emphasis on appropriate instruction and the learning outcomes of students with special needs. We believe that access to high-quality programs, quality teachers and technology should be used in ways that lead to maximizing the potential of this important group of students. Among other measures, these efforts should include improved access to assistive technology, inclusion in regular assessment, instructional and accountability systems, and improved postsecondary transitional supports. Finally, financial support for these students should meet the original federal commitment promised.

contribute so mightily to these gaps.

For all of our initiatives and good intentions, our nation has been unable to ensure that each and every American child can attend a quality public school. Instead, both political parties, and all levels of government, have advanced reforms that, while well intentioned, have not risen to the level necessary to address the depth and breadth of the daunting challenges of equity and excellence facing American public education at the beginning of the 21st century.

### **Does this seem like hyperbole? Then ask:**

- Would a globally competitive country tolerate the fact that some states and districts spend two to three times per pupil more than their poorer counterparts, when higher-performing nations take fiscal equity among schools as a given—and there is agreement across the political spectrum in such nations that poorer students merit extra investment to surmount disadvantage? How can we have an education reform strategy that doesn't demand

an equitable allocation of resources tied to student needs?

- Would a globally competitive country leave the quality of education to a diffuse system of 100,000 public schools of varying types operated by countless state and local school boards in 15,000 school districts and 50 states, subject to state and local political shifts and economic volatility, when the best-performing systems are organized to do whatever it takes to deliver and sustain equity and excellence across the entire nation?
- Would a country serious about teacher excellence settle for having only 30 percent of its educators coming from the top third of the college pool<sup>25</sup> when the best school systems in the world recruit nearly all of their school talent from the top third of the academic cohort? And how is it that we are alone among advanced countries in assigning our least-prepared teachers to those who most need our best?
- Would a country serious about early childhood preparation accept that only 65 percent of 4-year-olds from the lowest-income backgrounds attend preschool (with many attending low-quality programs), compared with 90 percent from the highest-income backgrounds,<sup>26</sup> when the best-performing school systems make such access universal and view it as critical to national success?<sup>27</sup>
- Would a country serious about economic competitiveness, given how important science is in today's world, tolerate only about one-third of its eighth-grade students achieving more than mere proficiency in science—with the average student who is African American, Latino, American Indian, Alaska Native or low-income not only failing to reach proficiency, but also falling short of basic achievement<sup>28</sup>—without having a national initiative to address such an enormous 21st-century deficit?

As these comparisons suggest, America has become an *outlier* nation in the way we fund, govern and administer K-12 schools, and also in terms of performance. No other developed nation has inequities nearly as deep or systemic; no other developed nation has, despite some efforts to the contrary, so thoroughly stacked the odds against so many of its children. Sadly, what feels so very un-American turns out to be distinctly American.

It's not that America hasn't increased spending on education over time—it has. By some measures, we spend as much as or even more as a share of our GDP than do other nations, which underscores that the amount of money spent is not the only factor affecting student achievement. Because efficiency is not just a recession strategy, but a recovery and a sustainability strategy, it is critical to spend money strategically on things that work. A look at certain local school districts proves the point: Some districts spend enormous sums with poor results, showing that *how* money is spent can be as important as *how much* is available.

That said, these districts are unusual. The common situation

in America is that schools in poor communities spend less per pupil—and often many thousands of dollars less per pupil—than schools in nearby affluent communities, meaning poor schools can't compete for the best teaching and principal talent in a local labor market and can't implement the high-end technology and rigorous academic and enrichment programs needed to enhance student performance. This is arguably the most important equity-related variable in American schooling today.

Let's be honest: We are also an outlier in how many of our children are growing up in poverty. Our poverty rate for school-age children—currently more than 22 percent—is twice the OECD average and nearly four times that of leading countries such as Finland. We are also an outlier in how we concentrate those children, isolating them in certain schools—often resource-starved schools—which only magnifies poverty's impact and makes high achievement that much harder. These bleak statistics highlight the challenges that we face.

It's also time we asked ourselves if some of the traditional assumptions of American schooling—indeed, even the ways schools are organized—have become barriers in the 21st century to achieving excellence and equity. Indeed, in a high-tech age with an almost limitless array of interactive information systems and electronic devices—many more familiar to children than to the adults who are assigned to instruct them—many American schools are still rooted in outmoded timetables, methods and schedules. Just as top American companies benchmark their operations against global best practices, we ought to be doing the same in education.

### Defining and Pursuing an Equity and Excellence Agenda

Fixing our nation's equity and excellence gaps is eminently doable—indeed, the recent formulation of Common Core State Standards (see text box on page 23) provides a unique moment to leverage excellence and equity for all and to build on efforts to foster critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and innovation, and communication. We have made good progress in recent years on such issues as adopting new standards that could better organize our efforts to enable students to succeed, turning our attention to our lowest-performing schools, and enforcing and complying with federal civil rights laws. But we cannot continue to leave the traditional structure of schools, systems and spending unexamined, and our nation can ill afford to become complacent in light of what it has already achieved. Of course we need consensus on policy goals and measures—the polestar toward which we will struggle together. That struggle, however, must draw strength from an invincible moral and political commitment to each and every child, and his or her future.

What exactly would it take to dramatically speed up school improvement and system redesign to match the accelerating rate of change in the global economy? To honestly and firmly confront the toll taken by concentrated poverty in some of our schools and

by the deep inequities between schools and between students? To finally muster the collective will to ensure that every child in America is prepared to participate fully in our civic and economic life?

In the balance of this report, we lay out the major elements of an agenda that we believe to be equal to the scale of the challenge. It starts, of course, with high standards of learning for all our students and a commitment to do what it takes to get each and every one of them there. All of the high-performing countries make that their central commitment; we should, too.

There are five parts to our action strategy, each critical and each connected to the others—

- First, we begin with a restructuring of the finance systems that underlie every decision about schools, focusing on equitable resources and their cost-effective use.
  - Second, we examine the most critical resource of all: quality teachers and school leaders, the supports they need to be effective with all learners and ways to make sure all students have access to high-quality instructional opportunities.
  - Third, we explain the importance of starting early—making the case for high-quality early learning for all children, especially for low-income children, who need it most.
  - Fourth, there is the matter of providing critical support—including increased parental engagement, access to health and social services, extended instructional time and assistance for at-risk groups—that students in high-poverty communities need to start strong and stay on track.
  - And fifth, we lay out the changes in accountability and governance necessary to ensure that, a decade from now, there doesn't need to be yet another commission appointed to call public attention to the corrosive effects on the nation's children and our future of the failure to advance equity and excellence in America's public schools.
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# I. Improving School Finance and Efficiency

The time has come for bold action by the states—and the federal government—to redesign and reform the funding of our nation’s public schools. Achieving equity and excellence requires sufficient resources that are distributed based on student need, not zip code, and that are efficiently used.

Millions of families from every corner of the United States send their children to public schools every day. Regardless of where they live, whether they are in the middle class or aspiring to join it, these families have a right to expect that these schools will provide their children an opportunity to share in the American dream. But all too often, reality is more complicated, as students, families and communities are burdened by the broken system of education funding in America. With few exceptions, states continue to finance public education through methods that have no demonstrable link to the cost of delivering rigorous academic standards and that can produce high achievement in all students, including but not limited to low-income students, English-language learners, students with disabilities, students in high poverty and students who live in remote schools and districts. Few states have rationally determined the cost of enabling all students to achieve established content and performance standards, including the cost of achieving those

standards across diverse student populations and geographic locations. Most states do not properly ensure the efficient use of resources to attain high achievement for all students. A meaningful educational opportunity requires that states make sure all students receive the resources to achieve rigorous academic standards and obtain the skills to compete in the economy and participate capably as citizens in a democratic society.

Accordingly, this commission believes the time has come for bold action by the states—and the federal government—to redesign and reform the funding of our nation’s public schools. The deep inequities in school funding documented by another federal commission more than 40 years ago (see “Property Taxes and School Finance” box below) remain entrenched across our nation’s states and school districts at a time when more than 40 percent of all American public school children are enrolled in districts of concentrated student poverty. (see “School Funding Disparities” box on page 18).

## Property Taxes and School Finance

How big a problem is the local property tax basis of school finance in terms of generating fiscal inequity today? In 1972, President Nixon’s Commission on School Finance issued a report titled *Schools, People, Money: The Need for Educational Reform* that explored the effects of our reliance on property taxes to fund our schools. The report found that many of the problems with education funding equity and adequacy were the direct result of antiquated state school funding formulas, which relied too heavily on local property taxes.

Local sources of revenue, particularly property tax, have traditionally been a large source of funding for schools. Indeed, concerns about the role of local property taxes in creating and furthering school-funding inequities were central to the initial involvement of the courts in these matters. The fundamental concern with this system of school finance is that people living in property-rich districts can fund their public schools more generously, and at lower tax rates, than can residents in lower-income areas. This is not widely understood.

Imagine two towns: Town A has \$100,000 in taxable property per pupil; Town B has \$300,000. If Town A votes to tax its property at 4 percent, it raises \$4,000 per pupil. But Town B can tax itself at 2 percent and raise \$6,000 per pupil. Town B’s tax rate is half as high as Town A’s, but its public schools enjoy 50 percent more resources per student.

State experiences with school finance reform have shown that property-rich communities are not always exclusively home to rich families and students; communities with high home values, for example, may also be home to a large percentage of low-income students, and vice versa. Across different states and regions, the relationship between large property bases (which include commercial, industrial and natural resource producers in addition to residential property) and the income and wealth of the residents varies widely.

In 14 states, property taxes (and other local sources) still represent more than 50 percent of total school funding.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in Illinois and Nevada, 60 percent of education funding still comes from local sources.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, many states have reduced their reliance on local taxes, have increased the percentage of their educational funding that comes from statewide sources and have sought to use the increased state-level contributions (often as a result of lengthy litigation) to mitigate inequity. In eight states, statewide funding now represents more than 60 percent of total education funding.<sup>32</sup> In New Mexico, for example, 70 percent of such funding comes from statewide sources; in Vermont, more than 85 percent of funding for education comes from statewide sources.<sup>33</sup>

Although the link between locally based school finance and per-pupil spending inequities is still a concern for many states and localities, the connection between the two has become increasingly complex. As noted in this report, states should therefore be thoughtful about balancing interests in local control and school funding with the need to address existing and persistent inequities.

There is disagreement about exactly how to change the system, but there is complete agreement that achieving equity and excellence requires sufficient resources that are distributed based on student need and that are efficiently used. The historical record makes clear that simply following the plans and practices of the past will not lead us to the outcomes we clearly need as a nation.

Moreover, the situation has become even more worrisome in recent years. As the nation has worked to escape the distress of the recession of 2008, state fiscal difficulties have been slow to be resolved—leading to pressures to cut the funding for schools. Thus, districts in many states are faced with an imperative to improve their results as their budgets are reduced.

The problems become even more serious in some districts, where overall economic hardships, unemployment, homelessness, lack of food security and inadequate access to health care have deepened for many low-income families and where schools are losing resources. We must make sure that our most vulnerable populations do not bear the brunt of the fiscal problems of the states and recognize that across-the-board cuts and austerity budgets tend to hurt schools serving poor students the most, as they rely heavily on state funds for their survival.

Just as we must eliminate the efforts that have not succeeded, as we put an equity and excellence agenda in place, we must install a dynamic system of continuous improvement. As there are no easy universal solutions to achieving equity and excellence, we must learn from and expand the programs and policies shown to achieve our goals. Such an approach is integral to making sure that the added resources provided to schools generate the academic outcomes we desire.

Providing sufficient resources and ensuring the effective use of resources must be linked. Both are needed to lead us past the disappointments that have accumulated since *A Nation at Risk*<sup>34</sup> called for a new path some three decades ago.

For all these reasons, Americans should expect their states, U.S. territories and the federal government to follow a more promising path—one that lives up to the country's worthiest aspirations by getting serious about providing the necessary resources to the schools that need them and ensuring they are used effectively.

Below are the commission's recommendations. Funding is mentioned throughout this report, but here we focus on a set of principles for necessary changes to the funding systems that fuel our schools.

## Finance and Efficiency: The Role of States and Local Districts

The commission recommends that all states—

- Identify and publicly report the teaching staff, programs and services needed to provide a meaningful educational opportunity to all students of every race and income level, including English-language learners and students with disabilities, based on evidence of effective education practices. They should also

### School Funding Disparities

Wide disparities in funding levels among the states ranged from a low of \$6,454 per pupil in Utah to \$18,167 in New York in 2010.<sup>35</sup> Adjusted for student poverty, regional wage variation, and school district size and density, the difference in 2009 ranged from \$7,306 per pupil in Tennessee to \$19,520 in Wyoming.<sup>36</sup>

Funding also varies across districts within states. In most states, the highest-spending districts pay about twice as much per pupil as the lowest-spending districts. In some states, like California, the ratio is more than 3-to-1. (Even excluding the top 5 percent of districts, spending ranged from \$6,032 to \$18,025 per pupil in California in 2009.<sup>37</sup>)

Although recent analyses show disagreement on the extent of the overall gap in spending between poor and more affluent schools,<sup>38</sup> it is clear that students in many high-poverty districts receive less funding than those in low-poverty districts. In Illinois, for example, high-poverty districts typically spend one-third less than low-poverty districts—\$8,707 per pupil as compared with \$11,312 per pupil—although they serve the greatest concentrations of students with high levels of need.<sup>39</sup>

On top of this, in many districts, there also exists a significant gap between the spending at low-poverty and high-poverty schools, a gap that denies equal let alone equitable resources for the students most in need. For example, a study by the Department of Education in 2011 found that more than one-third of higher-poverty schools had lower per-pupil personal expenditures than the lower-poverty schools in their districts.<sup>40</sup> A different report found that the gap in average teacher salaries between high-poverty and low-poverty elementary schools was \$2,668 in Austin, Texas, and \$5,231 in Sacramento, California.<sup>41</sup>

The concentration of poverty in the nation's public schools is growing. In 2009, almost 40 percent of all American students were enrolled in districts with concentrated poverty.<sup>42</sup> In Texas, where districts serving more low-income students also spend less than those with fewer low-income students, total public school enrollment between 1998–99 and 2008–09 increased by 20 percent, with a big jump in the number of students who are low-income, rising from 48.4 percent to 56.6 percent.<sup>43</sup> In 2008–09, Texas public schools served more than 2 million low-income students.

Observers disagree about the correlation between funding disparities and student achievement,<sup>44</sup> but there is broad agreement about the clear need for additional resources to deliver rigorous academic standards to students living in high-poverty districts. The majority of states do not provide additional funding for students living in high concentrations of poverty.

determine and report the actual costs of resources identified as needed to provide all students a meaningful educational opportunity based on the efficient and cost-effective use of resources.

- Adopt and implement a school finance system that will provide equitable and sufficient funding for all students to achieve state content and performance standards. Equitable resources may in some cases mean more than equal investment; as is often the case in other advanced nations, it includes the provision of additional resources to address the academic and other needs of low-income students, students with disabilities and English-language learners, and for districts and schools serving large concentrations of low-income students and those in remote

areas. States should also ensure that their respective finance systems are supported by stable and predictable sources of revenue to provide meaningful educational opportunities and to promote high achievement on an ongoing basis.

- Periodically review, develop performance evidence and update their finance systems to respond to changes in academic standards, student demographics, program research, costs and other factors relevant to maintaining meaningful educational opportunities and to reaching high levels of achievement for all students.
- Develop systems to ensure districts and schools effectively and efficiently use all education funding to enable students, regardless of the governance structure in their schools or districts, to achieve state content and performance standards and put in place systems of continuous improvement that expand effective programs and policies and eliminate ineffective ones.
- Ensure that funding is equitable and publicly reported for all public schools in the state and district, including charter schools, magnet schools, tribal schools and other distinctive public schools, while taking into account school characteristics such as size, geography, demographics and student need.
- Promote the development of high-quality programs for special-needs students without providing incentives to over-classify students into special education.
- Develop models, reduce barriers and fund systems that use technology to enhance instruction and efficiently deliver high-quality education.
- Develop data and information systems to provide guidance and feedback on the achievement of students relative to their needs and resources.

### Finance and Efficiency: The Federal Role

Numerous reports and studies have documented the inequities and inadequacies of the states' public education finance systems. These studies have underscored the fact that the American education system is failing too many of its children and that this failure threatens the nation's ability to compete and retain leadership in the global economy. These reports have recommended a variety of steps to deal with the inequities, inadequacies and poor outcomes of state education systems and to hold states accountable for higher student achievement. For more than 40 years, federal, state and local governments have implemented various initiatives in an attempt to redress these problems. These initiatives have not addressed the fundamental sources of inequities and so have not generated the educational gains desired. Despite these efforts and proclamations, large achievement gaps remain, and local finance and governance systems continue to allow for, and in many ways encourage, inequitable and inadequate funding systems and inefficient and ineffective resource utilization.

### American Indian and Alaska Native Students

There are 183 Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools that serve approximately 41,000 students in 23 states.<sup>45</sup> But the vast majority (nearly 93 percent) of AI/AN students attend K-12 public schools with their non-AI/AN peers.<sup>46</sup>

Whether they attend BIE schools or regular public schools, AI/AN students should have access to a quality education. Unfortunately, under the current system, AI/AN students are struggling academically compared with their peers of other racial and ethnic groups. According to the National Indian Education Study (NIES)<sup>47</sup>, AI/AN students lag behind other racial/ethnic groups in mathematics and reading in both the fourth and eighth grades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011 NAEP NIES Summary of National Results).<sup>48</sup> Further, AI/AN students are significantly more likely to drop out of school.<sup>49</sup> They are also more likely to suffer from poverty, suicide, teen birth and substance abuse at rates higher than the national average.<sup>50</sup>

AI/AN students need to receive better support from their respective learning communities to have equal opportunities for success.

We have, however, learned from past efforts and believe we are in a position to move forward. There is no constitutional barrier to a greater federal role in financing K-12 education. It is, rather, a question of our nation's civic and political will; the modest federal contribution that today amounts to approximately 10 percent of national K-12 spending is a matter of custom, not a mandate. The federal government must take bold action in specific areas.

Therefore, [the commission recommends](#) that the federal government—

- Direct states, with appropriate incentives, to adopt and implement school finance systems that will (1) provide a meaningful educational opportunity for all students, along with appropriate budgetary and other frameworks to ensure the effective and efficient use of all funds to enable all students to achieve state content and performance standards as outlined above, and (2) demonstrate progress toward implementing such a school finance system.
- Enact “equity and excellence” legislation that: targets significant new federal funding to schools with high concentrations of low-income students, particularly where achievement gaps exist, to implement meaningful educational opportunities for (and support high academic achievement by) all their students; provides significant financial incentives to states that, in fact, enhance their own funding of schools with high concentrations of low-income, minority and low-performing students; and develops mechanisms that allow the federal government to monitor and enforce the ongoing performance of its new equity and excellence investments to make sure those investments are, in fact, enhancing student achievement.
- Provide incentives for states to explore and pursue ways to reduce the number of schools with concentrated poverty, because schools without concentrated poverty cost less to run than schools with concentrated poverty.

- Reassess its enforcement regime with respect to issues of school finance equity. There is greater constitutional scope for federal enforcement with respect to issues of inequity linked to race. The federal government should consider expanding its authority to address longstanding and persistent issues of inequity in school finance, including new enforcement steps that stop short of withdrawing funding from students most in need. Steps that might be considered include enforcement mechanisms derived from other areas of federal civil rights law; these all have advantages and disadvantages that should be carefully considered. Enforcement with respect to school finance equity should provide a safe harbor for systems achieving equity in student outcomes regardless of input equity.
  - Ensure that its dollars are not used to perpetuate or exacerbate inequities.
  - Ensure equitable distribution of state and local resources among schools within districts by amending Title I, which endorses the local practice of often providing lesser amounts of state and local funds per pupil to Title I than non-Title I schools; eliminating counterproductive incentives in the Higher Education Act; and encouraging districts to achieve this goal by rethinking compensation, seniority provisions, staff attrition and other effective strategies.
  - Reevaluate the federal commitment to the level and distribution of the funding of special education, including providing incentives to ensure improved outcomes of students and to limit any over-identification of special-education students.
  - Work with states to develop accounting principles and procedures to provide annual, uniform and mandatory data of actual expenditures at the school level.
  - Provide grants to assist states, tribal authorities and school districts in developing cost methodologies that can determine the cost of providing meaningful educational opportunities and of promoting high achievement, taking into account, among other things, the effective and efficient use of funds and the cost of providing necessary additional programs and supports for low-income students, students in remote locales, students with disabilities and English-language learners.
  - Fully acknowledge the trust responsibility it has in working with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes by helping them build their capacity to operate their own school systems, ensuring their access—as well as the Bureau of Indian Education’s access—to all funding opportunities and by directing state education agencies to engage with their tribal partners directly.
  - Provide grants to improve data availability on finance and student performance and to expand the capacity of state education agencies (SEAs) to effectively use data to improve how they carry out the functions described above.
  - Enforce its equity mandates in a fair and intelligent manner. Enforcement mechanisms should be tied to federal funding and equity of outcomes.
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## II. Teaching, Leading and Learning Opportunities

All students must have access to high-quality instruction. To that end, states must re-examine and align their systems for recruiting, retaining, preparing, licensing, evaluating, developing and compensating effective teachers. Highly effective, well-qualified teachers must be equitably distributed across districts and schools. Students, especially those in high-need schools and districts, need strong principals.

We cannot close the gaps between our aspirations and our performance with formulaic responses to complex learning challenges. Imagine a school in which every student has teachers with the training, supports and colleagues needed to understand whether and why a child is struggling to achieve. Imagine that each teacher is part of a problem-solving team of fellow professionals, with access to qualified and inspiring instructional leaders. Suppose *each* struggling child has a teacher with the expertise to identify alternative instructional strategies *and* with the professional responsibility, judgment and authority to adopt a strategy that will work for *that* child. Imagine that teachers and parents can have confidence that *each* student will get the instructional supports and social or health services needed for academic success.

We can strengthen and elevate the teaching profession by broadening the role and expectations for teachers and matching those with the respect and compensation teachers deserve. This is more than a prescription for career ladders or one aspect of effective teaching. It is a pledge we can make to each child and a test for almost every aspect of the education enterprise: ***Are we giving each child a fair chance to develop fully his or her talents, and to succeed?***

Teachers, together with principals, are the single most important *in-school factor* affecting student achievement.<sup>51</sup> America needs and our children deserve the best teacher workforce in the world: one held in high regard by our citizens, recruited from among the best and the brightest, well trained and supported on the job, and competitively compensated for their effectiveness and hard work. Most important, teachers and instructional teams must have the professional development, time, collaboration and teaching resources to understand each student's learning needs in order to match instruction, time and attention necessary to meet them. We need strong leaders to support each teacher's growth and to organize resources in ways that enable them to work together in great schools that meet all children's learning needs.

Given the many equity challenges facing our schools, none seems more crucial—or more daunting—than the need to improve teachers' capacities to teach all children well and, in particular, to ensure that there is a stable supply of excellent teachers

and school leaders in our highest-need schools. To create and retain such a workforce, we must not only have excellent school leadership and an adequate and equitable funding stream to ensure well-resourced learning environments for every child, but we must also have policies and practices that develop, select and fairly distribute a highly effective teacher workforce to all schools.

In state after state, school finance suits have challenged the fact that schools serving low-income and minority students have disproportionately high numbers of teachers who are inexperienced, untrained and teaching in subjects for which they have little or no training. This drives extraordinarily high rates of teacher turnover, producing instability and chaos in the instructional program. These conditions are often directly linked to disparities in school funding, which produce significant disparities in educator salaries and working conditions.<sup>52</sup> It should be no surprise that the best teachers over time gravitate to more affluent schools with better pay and working conditions, and where children seem easier to teach because they come to school without the many overt challenges that children from poor families face. Those who choose to teach in poor communities often do so despite the additional hurdles they will encounter. We do far too little to ensure that schools in poor communities are staffed with teachers who can be effective with the toughest challenges. While there are thousands of great teachers working their hearts out in these schools despite tremendous obstacles, they often do so in a system woefully designed to support and scale up their efforts.

Unlike several decades ago, major urban school systems today too often pay teachers much less than surrounding affluent suburbs and offer substantially poorer teaching conditions: larger class sizes; less access to books, computers, and other curriculum and instructional materials; and fewer instructional supports. Their schools have less, yet their students need more. Poor rural districts often have even larger differentials in funding, salaries and conditions.

The policy response to these intolerable conditions has too often been to lower the standards for entry into teaching rather than to directly address student needs. So the most challenging schools have teachers who are less well qualified, on average, by

any standard: academic ability, content background, experience, preparation, certification and education level. Our system is not designed to serve America's best interests.

There is little dispute about the need to fix all this. And the commission is confident that people acting in good faith, with a full appreciation for the urgency required, can bridge their differences about how to do it. Yet, the necessary political will and drive elude us. Attracting, developing and retaining talented teachers is key to our strategy and central to a system that provides competitive salaries and excellent working conditions for well-qualified, highly effective teachers who will work in affluent and low-income districts alike.

### Attracting and Training Top Talent

Any serious plan for equity and excellence immediately runs into a vexing question: why don't more of our smartest, most accomplished college graduates want to become teachers? Although the world's best-performing school systems recruit their new teachers from the top ranks of their high school and college students, only about 30 percent of U.S. teachers come from the top third of their college class.<sup>53</sup> Although teacher preparation has improved in some areas since the 1980s, and most secondary school teachers now come from the top half of their academic cohort, the caliber of student who goes into teaching remains highly variable across states and districts, and a large portion of the lowest-performing candidates work in schools serving the lowest-achieving students. We won't have a serious equity policy until we steer our best talent to the classrooms where it's most needed; and we won't raise the bar for all children until far more of our entering teachers in all schools are well prepared themselves.

**Teacher Preparation.** The quality of our teacher preparation programs varies wildly. Some states have raised standards significantly; others have progressively lowered the bar. High-quality programs are more expensive, as they offer intensive coursework integrated with clinical models that ensure excellent mentors and close supervision in learning to teach. Meanwhile, the many lower-quality programs—often short and cheap—fail to provide the skills, knowledge and experience necessary for success in the classroom.

**Teacher Pay.** Starting salaries and salary trajectories need to be sufficiently competitive to attract the talent we need to the classroom. A half-century ago, women and African American college graduates had few professional career choices other than teaching. New teachers' pay was close to that of first-year lawyers. But a large salary gap has grown over time even as this previously "captive" labor pool enjoyed new and more lucrative career options. Furthermore, the salary gap across school districts and states means that the most attractive teaching positions are those in the most advantaged communities where pay and working conditions are most supportive.

### How Other Nations Ensure a Quality Teaching Force<sup>54</sup>

Several of the ways that high-achieving countries attract and keep top talent illustrate how far we have to go:

First, our global competitors offer their teachers competitive salaries and reasonable working conditions that are equitable among schools, including a longer workday and work year with significantly more time to plan individually and together with teams of teachers, so that all schools can compete in the labor market for good teachers. Some add incentives, such as a quicker route to seniority and promotions, for teachers who teach in more remote or challenging schools.

Second, they offer free higher education—including free high-quality teaching preparation programs to all candidates, with a salary or a living stipend while recruits go to school. As a consequence, new teachers do not, as in the United States, enter a poorly paid profession with a mountain of debt. Strong preparation both raises the status of the profession, because teachers share a substantial knowledge base, and makes teachers more effective, which keeps them from leaving in frustration, as underprepared teachers do in the United States.

Third, unlike in America, teachers in high-performing countries can draw on common instructional materials aligned with rigorous, national curriculum frameworks that all students are expected to master and that form the basis of teacher development and training.

Finally, because of these conditions, teachers have more professional development, collaboration, time, teaching resources and support from teaching teams to make important decisions about their work. They also work collaboratively with other teachers and with well-prepared principals, which makes them more effective and more likely to want to stay in the profession as a long-term career.

### Supporting and Retaining Effective Teachers

To recruit and retain excellent teachers, we must move beyond the factory-model schools we have inherited, with their egg-crate classrooms and other outmoded constraints, while better compensating excellent teachers who are willing and able to innovate in the cause of greater learning. This is essential not only for recruitment, but also for retention of excellent teachers. We must be able to keep our most effective teachers in the classroom.

To succeed with all children, particularly those who are struggling, teachers need not only to be well-prepared, but also to have the support, professional development, time and teaching resources necessary to deliver high-quality instruction.

**Professional Development.** We have raised our standards for student performance and taken on the challenge of ensuring that *all students learn* even as our classrooms are growing more diverse, including English-language learners and students with special needs. The Common Core State Standards require new approaches to teaching and learning. All these changes put new demands on teachers and require that they receive professional development, that new teachers have access to expert practitioners and that teams work together in new ways. Fortunately, we have increased understanding, improved

measurements of student learning and implemented technology that enables new ways of providing instruction to meet students' needs. Still, while the nation as a whole spends in excess of \$3 billion on professional development,<sup>55</sup> much of it is not spent well.

Professional development must be embedded in the workday, deepen and broaden teacher knowledge, be rooted in best practice, allow for collaborative efforts, be aligned to the Common Core State Standards and provide the supports, time and resources to enable teachers to master new content, pedagogy and learning tools and incorporate them in their practice.

Full and effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards will be crucial to realizing their potential of helping all students reach high standards. Given that education budgets are stretched thin and teachers throughout the country are being asked to do more with less, there are reasonable concerns that states and school systems may skimp on implementation of the Common Core State Standards, which could further fuel the current fixation on testing as opposed to teaching and learning.

In fact, Common Core State Standards create an enormous opportunity to lower the cost and increase the quality of aligned learning supports for teachers.

In tight budgets and in schools and districts with especially low funding levels, quality professional development time and resources are often the first items left off the list. States, districts and schools will need to closely examine current spending on professional development to align it more closely with an integrated strategy for supporting teachers and with today's needs.

Districts and states must also invest continuously in professional development: implementing an entirely new curriculum and assessment system requires a transitional investment above and beyond existing state levels.

**Collaboration.** Teachers don't work in a vacuum. They need time for collaboration to learn from one another, observe best practice and develop effective instructional materials. To find that time, districts and schools will need to use time more effectively and efficiently. This will require a careful look at current calendars and schedules as well as a look at emerging technologies so that more time for teachers to meet together can be achieved.

**Time.** If we are to meet the needs of struggling students, we need to both expand time for students and teachers and use it better. By rethinking the traditional school schedule, we can provide students more academic instruction and individualize support and give teachers more freedom and creativity in their professional practice to individualize their teaching, collaborate with colleagues, use data to better assess students' progress and needs, and plan lessons accordingly. In expanded time settings, teachers can learn continuously, improve their practice and transform their schools into learning communities.<sup>59</sup>

### We Can Afford to Invest in Teachers

Market research shows that raising starting pay to \$65,000 from today's \$37,000, and top salaries to \$150,000 instead of around \$70,000 (along with related investments in better school leadership and working conditions), would lift the percentage of new teachers in high-poverty schools coming from the top third of their academic cohort from 14 percent today to 68 percent and would cost (at current teacher/student ratios) an estimated \$30 billion a year, or about 5 percent of current K-12 spending.<sup>56</sup>

Such an investment would produce savings elsewhere, including a reduction in teacher turnover and attrition, which currently costs an estimated \$7 billion every year<sup>57</sup>—not to mention the savings we get from teacher effectiveness: lower rates of student remediation, special education placements, dropout services, and much more.

In addition, as noted elsewhere in this report, if such a human capital strategy helps close the achievement gaps between U.S. students and higher-performing systems abroad, and between students of color and their white counterparts, the impact on GDP over time would dwarf the investment in higher-caliber teacher recruits in the years ahead.

### The Promise of the Common Core State Standards<sup>58</sup>

For decades, attempts to set rigorous, common standards for students across the nation failed to gain traction, as academic expectations for students had historically been seen as a state responsibility. As a result, for too long states failed to hold their students accountable for the kind of learning that would prepare them to succeed in college and careers, much less compete with their peers in high-performing countries. By 2009, state leaders decided that common standards were in the national interest.

Under the leadership of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Common Core State Standards in reading and mathematics were developed in collaboration with a large number of stakeholders, including teachers. The standards are intended to prepare America's students for college and the workforce and are driven by a thorough research base and international benchmarking. They are intended to guide teaching and learning and help ensure that students receive a consistent, high-quality education. Today, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards, and states and school districts, as well as teachers and school leaders, are in varying stages of changing curriculum, instruction, assessments and teacher professional development to ensure a successful implementation of the standards.

Although the federal government had no role in developing the standards, the U.S. Department of Education is assisting the effort to fully implement the Common Core State Standards. Because states needed help with the financial wherewithal to create assessments aligned with the standards, the department provided \$350 million to two consortia to do the work.

This state-led effort is a model for solving intractable problems in American education. Working together, states can identify problems and provide the leadership to solve them, with the federal government's backing and support.

### A New Role for Technology in Teaching

Teachers need many kinds of support as their jobs continue to change. One of the most significant potential changes facing teachers is the advent of new technology in the classroom. We have begun to see significant changes—the introduction of new data and analytical tools for the classroom, structured instructional programs, changes in presentation and roles of teachers. While the promise of technology remains ahead of the reality, there is little doubt that technology will significantly change the classrooms of the future.

To use technology effectively and to participate in its implementation, teachers and school staff will need different training and ongoing support. The changes will not be just substituting electronic books for paper books; they will call for different ways of doing things.

Technology labs, “flipped” classrooms and instructional games call for new ways of organizing the classroom and of interacting with students.

Moreover, teachers will be called upon to enter into more of the decision-making on which technology is introduced and how it will be used. Over the next few years, decisions about educational technology will likely interact with various performance incentives for teachers and schools, thus making teachers’ jobs more complicated. To address these challenges, states and districts will need to develop better systems to aid teachers in the transition to a more technological world—both so that the teachers are not overwhelmed and so that students get the full educational gains.

**Resources.** To assist students, teachers need curricular materials and technology systems that support learning. The materials and technology must be aligned to the new standards—not as mandates or straitjackets, but as supports. This includes well-equipped work environments with access to up-to-date learning resources. This is especially true of teachers in struggling schools.

Because 45 states plus the District of Columbia have adopted Common Core State Standards, teachers don’t need to develop these materials alone. The Common Core State Standards provide not only more economies of scale for wide adoption of best practices, but also new opportunities to innovate across schools, districts and states. And, of great importance, it also provides a framework for aligning teacher training and professional development. Teachers don’t learn to teach; they learn to teach something. They learn how to make the curriculum relevant to the lives of the children they are charged with instructing: how to tie it to those children’s experiences and deliver it to address their special needs. To that end, teachers should have access to a variety of resources, such as model curricular frameworks aligned to the Common Core, curricular materials, units, sample assignments, assessments and the technology that allow them greater flexibility to meet the needs of their students.

**School Culture.** A collaborative school culture, where teachers are respected, their voices heard and their professional development needs met, is essential for success, particularly with children with the most learning needs. For teachers to succeed they must have the time, materials and school environment that foster learning and

collaboration. Class size must be manageable, facilities clean and up-to-date, and discipline policies in place that are administered fairly and that encourage and support courteous behavior and learning.

**Teacher Evaluations.** Today, in many if not most school districts, we have an inadequate method of evaluating teachers. To be effective, an evaluation system must serve two central purposes: It must identify strengths and weaknesses so that all teachers can get the necessary supports to improve their practice, and it must identify those teachers who even with assistance are unable to meet the standards of practice that would allow them to remain in the classroom.

Sound evaluation systems must be based on high standards of practice, and the assessment of teachers must include valid multiple measures of academic growth, evidence from classroom and school practice, and contributions to colleagues and the school community.

Good evaluation systems should provide feedback to educators from both colleagues and supervisors that is meaningful, credible and actionable. The feedback must be connected to high-quality learning opportunities and should use evidence-based processes that are fair, accurate and transparent.

To ensure meaningful and fair evaluations, evidence of student learning should not rely solely on standardized tests. Policies that use such measures in that inappropriate manner tend to misclassify the competence of teachers, as well as reduce the morale of teachers, create disincentives to teach the highest-need students, undermine public confidence in schooling and encourage teacher-preparation programs and schools to focus on raising test scores rather than on teaching children important concepts with a rich curriculum that includes the arts and humanities in addition to core subjects. Policies that incorporate standardized tests and other student-learning measures appropriately, on the other hand, along with other evidence of teacher practice and contributions, can help steer the system toward improvement. With a valid and comprehensive system of teacher development and evaluation in place, districts and states can and should formulate a fair process for tenure, career ladders and, when necessary, removal of ineffective teachers who do not improve.

Getting evaluations right and using those evaluations to improve our teaching force—both through professional development and through removing chronically ineffective teachers—has huge implications for the nation. Most of our current teachers are hardworking and effective and should be recognized for that. But a small proportion of our teachers do not meet minimum standards, and we must deal with that reality.

Some analysis of teacher effectiveness suggests that raising the performance of a small percentage of teachers—the least effective ones, who would be identified by an improved evaluation system—up to that of the average teacher could result in achievement gains that would bring us up to the level of the top nations in the world.<sup>60</sup> And, as indicated in the introduction, this could mean future gains

### Examples of Equity Efforts: Long Beach and New Haven

In California's **Long Beach Unified School District**<sup>61</sup>—a predominantly minority district widely recognized for its achievement gains—teacher recruitment, development and evaluation work together to support equity for students. An extensive, long-term partnership with California State University—Long Beach has transformed teacher preparation into a site-based model like a medical residency. The partnership has also created model demonstration sites for engaging prospective teachers, veterans and university faculty in teacher development and collaborative research. Novice teachers are supported with an intensive mentorship program in their early years. Ongoing professional learning builds on this strong start and is integrated with a thoughtful and rigorous teacher evaluation system.

From pre-service through in-service, teachers are evaluated on their performance in relation to the California Standards for the Teaching Profession. Teachers and administrators in the district collaborate to set goals for student progress and improvements in teacher practice at the school level, as teams within departments or grade levels, and as individuals. Progress toward achieving these goals is monitored through self-evaluations and supervisory evaluations that include evidence from teacher observations, tests, continued studies, feedback from students and parents, students' records and files demonstrating growth, action research and other sources.

One of the benefits of this evaluation process is that it stimulates individual and collective learning. In addition, the most expert teachers are encouraged to take on the highest-need students. Because gifted veterans can often move such students forward the most, the students gain much more than they otherwise would. At the same time, other teachers assigned to classes with fewer high-need students can experience greater success.

The district also creates explicit and ongoing opportunities for schools, departments and grade-level teams of teachers to review student work and test-score data of various kinds, to evaluate progress within and across classrooms, to discuss curriculum and teaching strategies, to problem-solve around the needs of individuals and groups of students, and to plan for improvements.

**New Haven Public Schools**<sup>62</sup> in Connecticut has also launched a comprehensive reform strategy—the School Change Initiative—to maximize New Haven's potential as a city, demonstrate the community's commitment to its children, grow the economy and cultivate a strong and skilled workforce. The goals of the initiative are to close the gap between the performance of New Haven students and the rest of the state within five years, cut the dropout rate in half and ensure that every graduating student has the academic ability and the financial resources to attend and succeed in college.

The district has developed specific strategies in three primary areas of focus: prioritization of high-needs schools, collaboration with the community and the cultivation of teacher and leader talent. Along with other efforts, the district is improving methods for recruiting, evaluating and developing its teachers and administrators. The new system includes formal recognition of high-performing teachers and administrators; linkage of teacher evaluation to student performance using multiple measures of student learning, as well as linkage to standards-based observations of classroom practice; removal of low-performing teachers within one school year if they don't improve after fair evaluation and mentoring; regular and comprehensive feedback for administrators, with professional consequences depending on performance; and an external validation process for teachers receiving the highest and lowest rankings.

to GDP of trillions of dollars, multiples of our current GDP.

Sometimes people interpret these observations as being “anti-teacher,” but it is just the opposite. The inescapable fact is that the majority of our teachers are competitive in international terms. Just a small portion is misplaced. Additionally, if pay were more aligned with both effectiveness and experience, it would be quite possible to see overall salaries of teachers raised significantly from current levels—reflecting their enormous impact on students, on the incomes of students and on economic growth.

### A New Model of Educator Responsibility

Just as evaluations must be based on multiple measures, we must also move away from a myopic and harmful fixation on testing to a 360-degree accountability system—a model in which all those responsible for the education of our children are held accountable. This model encompasses policymakers for ensuring the funds and developing the policies that allow for the development and support of a world-class educator force; teacher preparation programs for recruiting and preparing top-flight candidates; administrative leaders for making sure resources are distributed equitably and for creating a collaborative environment where teaching and learning can flourish; teachers for providing the instructional supports to help all children learn; and students for making the effort to learn.

One aspect of the 360-degree model of accountability should be transparency and progress toward the equitable distribution of highly effective, well-qualified teachers across districts and schools as a condition of federal funding. Implementation must be thoughtful and result in retaining great teachers in the schools and subjects where they are most needed. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and innovation and technology are key.

The commission recognizes that there are several ways to reach these accountability goals, including the following—

- Requiring that states set a uniform entry “bar” into the profession that includes in-depth academic preparation, diverse clinical experiences and excellent performance on a licensing assessment that measures subject matter knowledge.
- Creating a Teacher Quality Index wherein states, districts and schools report the following: the percentage of teachers in first year of teaching; the percentage of teachers teaching out of field; the percentage of certified teachers; aggregated data on teacher effectiveness at the school and district level; average experience of teachers by school; teacher turnover rates; and other data that the state or district might routinely collect.
- Developing innovative ways to ensure team teaching and group professional development using technology and real-time web-based peer observations.
- Using federal law enforcement authority under Titles I and II of ESEA, as well as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, to insist on equitable access to skilled teachers; collect necessary data from schools, districts and states; and fashion an index to

monitor differences. This will both ensure action and mete out consequences (loss of flexibility, requirements for change in policy and other enforcement steps that provide alternatives to withdrawing funds from students most in need).

## The Path Forward

Putting all of this together, the commission believes the implications are bold but clear. America must—in every state and virtually every district—completely align and overhaul our systems for recruiting, retaining, preparing, licensing, evaluating, developing and compensating effective teachers.

[The commission recommends](#) federal financial aid—a major new grant program—that gives incentives and requires participating states to address the teacher quality pipeline. In order to be eligible, states must—

- Ensure that teachers and teaching teams have the knowledge, time and teaching resources to develop strategies and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each student and accelerate student improvement and achievement.
- Ensure that teacher training and professional development programs are tailored to meet the needs of today’s contemporary classrooms—student bodies where students of color are increasingly the majority, a growing percentage of students are learning English as a second language, and more students are growing up in poverty.
- Increase selectivity and effectiveness of teacher training and hiring. Licensure must reflect the complexity of the work and include standards and rigorous performance assessments, set nationally, of actual ability to teach.
- Recruit and retain excellent multilingual teachers and teachers of color, and develop other strategies to increase the racial, ethnic and gender diversity of the teaching profession.
- Hold accountable teacher-training programs—whether offered by universities, districts or other providers—for producing effective graduates, and improve or close programs that can’t meet higher performance standards on a variety of important measures.
- Ensure that training and professional development use research-based curricula, with meaningful clinical experiences as preparation for diverse learners.
- Use research to overhaul teacher evaluation and professional development to promote performance in classrooms that will produce results for students most in need.
- Institute collaborative teacher teams.
- Redesign teacher evaluation and professional development—incorporating current research—to promote individual and collaborative efforts of teaching teams to produce continuous improvement in results for students most in need.

- Redesign career pathways for teachers so that recognition (and compensation) for accomplishment does not require leaving the classroom and so that collaboration among teachers is promoted.
- Overhaul compensation, especially to reflect broader professional expectations. Make compensation competitive with the market for similar professionals and revamp “step and lane” models to better reflect roles, effectiveness and level of challenge.
- Encourage effective teachers to teach in high-need schools and communities with incentives and critical improvements in working conditions, and reverse the disincentives to take on the biggest educational challenges facing the neediest children.
- Make teacher employment and tenure decisions only after teachers have time to be mentored, and base those decisions on valid and comprehensive measures of effectiveness in the classroom.
- Take all necessary measures to distribute highly effective teachers so that each student can get the help he or she needs to succeed. These measures should include pay incentives, targeted professional development and better working conditions and support in schools with the most need, and federal and state accountability and data-reporting systems to ensure that states and districts develop sustainable systems to close the teacher-quality gap.
- In parallel, invest in building strong principals by improving the pipeline to include more experience with building capacity and organizing time and structures to facilitate adult and student learning. Just as with teachers, this effort regarding principals should include a close look at preparation, performance and compensation, especially in high-need schools and districts. We are intentional about creating good leaders in business and the military. We must do better in education.

Additionally, [the commission recommends](#) that the federal government—

- Invest in high-quality residency programs that create a steady supply of highly effective recruits in high-need communities; and
- Invest in a substantial, sustained program of service scholarships fully paying for preparation costs for a diverse pool of high-ability candidates to teach, and stay, in high-need fields and schools, as we’ve done in medicine to address shortages of highly qualified doctors in high-need areas and as higher-performing countries such as Finland, Singapore, Korea, Canada and Australia have done with teachers.

## Access to High-Quality Curriculum and Learning Opportunities

Struggling and striving students need great teachers and equitable resources, but they also need access to high-quality instruction. All

too often, schools codify low expectations for some students by denying them the instructional content needed to prepare them for college and careers. There are three principal ways in which this happens.

The first involves consigning students to instructional “tracks” or programs that do not have the content students need to be academically successful. Examples of this often involve student placements, which often result in the over-identification of students—particularly boys of color—into special education or remedial classes that do not include critical features of the core curriculum. Students may also face restricted access to gifted and talented programs, where entry is determined through teacher, administrator or parent recommendations or scores on standardized tests that are not designed to identify special talents or potential. Similarly, English-language learners may be mistakenly placed in remedial reading programs or under-resourced special education services when their actual needs involve English-language development. These patterns of inequity can also be seen in how schools place students in alternative educational schools or programs from which they may never emerge or fail to keep track of how faithfully students are pursuing the core courses they need to graduate.

A second way that inequities are perpetuated is through coursework that is low in academic rigor, regardless of the course of study. In an effort to make the curriculum more “accessible” to low-achieving students, districts and schools sometimes water down coursework, which keeps students away from the more advanced content they need to succeed in subsequent grades. This is commonly done through the excessive use of “leveled” texts—or materials written specifically for students with poor reading skills—that fail to stretch children academically beyond their current literacy levels. It can also mean the provision of mismatched instructional interventions or an overemphasis on decoding skills; these fail to teach students the comprehension skills they need to be successful in later grades. With regard to the instruction of students learning English, this frequently means a focus on basic language acquisition only, instead of a shared focus on core content and academic language skills. Moreover, schools in poor communities often do not provide the full array of Advanced Placement courses, honors classes, and arts and music offerings that schools in wealthier areas offer, further limiting students from high-quality instruction.

A third way in which high-quality instruction can be denied to students is by excluding them from the school setting through suspensions and expulsions. The problem is both the excessive and disproportionate use of suspensions on the one hand and, on the other, the failure of schools to provide ongoing instructional

support, homework assignments or catch-up work for students while they are out of school or when they come back. The result is often an extraordinary number of lost instructional days for students, particularly students of color and students with disabilities.

Unfortunately, these instructional practices—and others—go hand-in-hand with inequities in funding and disparities in high-quality teachers that stack the deck against students of color, poor students, English learners and students with disabilities in ways that aggravate our achievement gaps in urban, suburban and rural schools alike, and impair our ability as a nation to raise student achievement.

Changing these patterns will require coherent action by the federal government, states and local school districts. For this reason, [the commission recommends](#) the following—

- State and local policies and graduation requirements should ensure that all students have access to the rigorous courses they need to succeed and that students are not being placed in settings that are not well aligned with their needs.
- School districts should devote more attention to assessing the instructional rigor of their core courses and the materials used in them.
- Districts should also establish data systems that would allow districts to track and correct in a timely manner the course-taking sequences of students who may not be on schedule for graduation. And school management and teacher organizations should collaborate to ensure that their collective bargaining agreements do not contain provisions that unwittingly restrict student access to the best teachers and instruction.
- The federal government should support the development of innovative technologies that can offer specialized courses to all students. We recognize the difficulty of offering high-quality courses such as AP preparation when the schools—urban, suburban and rural—have insufficient demand to support specialized staff or find that they cannot hire the necessary specialists. Fortunately, many of these problems can be solved by new technologies.
- In addition, federal, state and local entities should be working together to give all students full access to the Common Core State Standards now being implemented in so many jurisdictions.

Finally, federal and civil rights laws should be vigorously enforced to make sure students are not being excluded or treated unfairly because of race, language or disability.

# III. Ensuring Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education

Universal access to high-quality early learning programs must be a matter of the highest national priority, with a special priority for children in our poorest communities.

If we know anything about learning, it is that the years from birth to age 5 are crucial in every child's life.<sup>63</sup> Nowhere is achieving educational equity more important than at the earliest stages of a child's physical and cognitive development. Yet, in America, the poorer a child's family, the more likely he or she will begin school without the basic knowledge that enables that child to succeed. We cannot afford to let this state of affairs persist.

Fewer than half (48 percent) of poor children are ready for school at age 5, compared with 75 percent of children from families with moderate and high income, a 27 percentage point gap.<sup>64</sup> Between 2008 and 2010, 53 percent of U.S. children who were 3 and 4 years old did not participate in preschool.<sup>65</sup> Data from the National Household Education Surveys for 2005 and 2007 show that only 65 percent of 4-year-olds from the lowest-income quintiles attended a preschool program, compared with 90 percent from the highest-income quintile.<sup>66</sup> Changing that paradigm is a national imperative. The world's best-performing systems make such access universal. We must make sure all children have means-tested access to high-quality early childhood education. The consequence of inaction is clear: without a foundation of equal access to high-quality preschool and kindergarten programs, we risk the future of millions of children.

The research is dispositive: high-quality prekindergarten programs can make a tremendous difference in preparing children for success in school. Investment in early education for disadvantaged children during this critical period can benefit student achievement, reduce the need for special education, promote healthier lifestyles and lower overall social costs, including by decreasing the crime rate.<sup>67</sup> Participation in high-quality preschool programs results in short- and long-term positive outcomes for children, including increased high school graduation and higher rates for college attendance and completion.<sup>68</sup> Enrollment in prekindergarten programs, for example, has been linked to higher reading and math skills.<sup>69</sup> Access to preschool also encourages parental involvement and community integration.<sup>70</sup> Research has shown that key workforce skills are developed early in life, that early education can help offset the negative effects of growing up in a troubled family environment and that remedies later in life—such as job training programs and second-chance GED programs—are prohibitively costly in comparison.<sup>71</sup>

Every dollar invested in a high-quality early childhood education produces a 7 to 10 percent per annum return.<sup>72</sup> This means that taking early action to address the effects of adverse environments in young children can not only reverse some of the harm of disadvantage, but can also result in high economic return, producing results that are both equitable and efficient.<sup>73</sup>

Research is also clear on the characteristics of high-quality early learning programs. Highly effective teachers with specialized training in early childhood teaching get better results.<sup>74</sup> Small class sizes and low child-to-teacher ratios make a positive difference.<sup>74</sup> Preschool students benefit from intentional teaching focused on specific learning goals and academic content, and from deep learning opportunities through discovery and social interaction.<sup>76</sup> For young students learning English, this means strategic use of primary language in the classroom, and plenty of opportunity for practicing English. Most importantly, high-quality early learning programs are integrated and supported by a strong developmentally appropriate curriculum that is aligned to K-12 standards and instruction. Throughout the nation's urban, rural and tribal areas, qualified pre-K programs supported by states and appropriate federal agencies would include outreach efforts to recruit low-income children and children with other special needs. These programs would include strong accountability systems to ensure high-quality inputs and outcomes.

Given the high stakes for the country, ensuring universal access to high-quality early learning programs is a matter of the highest national priority, with a special focus for children in our poorest communities. For these reasons, [the commission recommends](#) the following—

- A bold new initiative and significant new investments to ensure that, within 10 years, all low-income children, in all states, have access to new resources for high-quality early learning. New federal resources will be conditioned upon states' development and implementation of systems of well-planned, high-quality early education for preschool-eligible children that match and foster the characteristics of high-quality programs. Moreover, to maintain a continuity of quality services for all children, regardless of where they live, states and the Bureau of Indian Education should also work to expand access to full-day kindergarten programs for students from low-income back-

grounds in schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education.

- The federal government must also ensure that the programs it funds (Head Start, Early Head Start, etc.) are aligned to the research on effective practices in early education. It must encourage and enable state and local governments to offer research-aligned programs and to coordinate services among school districts, Head Start and child-care programs, providing coordinated and integrated services as well.
- Ensuring that all children receive high-quality care and early education is as much about best practice as it is about efficient use of resources. The federal government provides significant funding for child care, Head Start, Early Head Start and other early childhood programs, but these resources are expended in an uncoordinated, inefficient and often ineffective manner. At a minimum, these funding streams ought to be aligned and coordinated, but the best way to ensure sustained high-quality

access aligned to K-12 is to require the Department of Education to administer Head Start and all other federal early learning programs, while also acknowledging the sovereign status of tribal governments to operate their programs within their lands.

An effective partnership between states and the federal government is crucial to achieving these goals. For these reasons, [the commission recommends](#) that the federal government do the following—

- Guarantee states a significant federal percentage match, related to the wealth of the state, for the cost of each child from a poverty background enrolled in a qualified pre-kindergarten program; and
- Consolidate its existing early childhood and Head Start programs and guarantee, within the next decade, that all low-income children will have access to early childhood programs.<sup>77</sup>

## IV. Meeting the Needs of Students in High-Poverty Communities

Communities, tribes, states and the federal government working together must create a policy infrastructure for providing services to underserved children by crafting standards to support at-risk children, encourage family engagement, and provide health care and health education and expanded learning time. They should explore options to limit the concentration of low-income students in particular schools.

Achieving excellence in American education depends on providing access to opportunity for all children, regardless of where they live or how much money their parents make. But, many of the problems our schools face begin elsewhere—in the home and family poverty, with inadequate health care, in dangerous communities and slum housing, in peer groups, in the larger culture. These external factors are, at best, explanations, not excuses.

Students from high-poverty backgrounds are at greater risk of academic failure, are more likely to be suspended from school and are more likely to drop out of school than are middle-income students. These students also sometimes face additional obstacles—such as homelessness, foster care, alcohol or drug problems, abuse and delinquency—that place them at even greater risk of never completing high school. Students who become involved in the criminal justice system must also be a policy priority, because these at-risk students cost society in both social-humanitarian and monetary terms.

Twenty-two percent of American schoolchildren live in conditions of poverty<sup>78</sup>—a poverty rate higher than that of any other advanced industrial nation in Europe, North America or Asia.<sup>79</sup> Nearly half of today's schoolchildren qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches.<sup>80</sup> The achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families is 30 to 40 percent larger among children born in 2001 than among those born 25 years earlier.<sup>81</sup> Poverty rates are disproportionately high for students of color.

Although these conditions do not absolve schools from their responsibility to expect and support educational excellence, they underscore the formidable barriers to school success for millions of students and their families.<sup>82</sup> Achievement gaps for most disadvantaged children begin before they start school and widen throughout their educational careers.<sup>83</sup> Most students enjoy advantages that are largely absent from the lives of the more than 16 million children now living in poverty. These advantages, long held to be important to students' success in school, include early educational experiences that prepare them for grade-level work, adequate physical (mental, dental and vision services) health care, extended learning experiences that reinforce and augment what

is learned in school, and family support that ensures students are motivated and prepared to learn.

The commission recommendations on school finance and access to high-quality early childhood education serve as a baseline for determining the needs of low-income students. In redesigning their finance systems, states should determine the additional programs, staff and services needed to address the extra academic, social and health needs of students in communities with concentrated poverty and ensure adequate funding so districts and schools can meet those needs.

Beyond this baseline, with proper encouragement and support from the states and the federal government, school districts can enter into productive relationships with other government agencies and community-based organizations that can ensure the efficient and cost-effective provision of a broad array of necessary services to students from poverty backgrounds. To address these disparities, the United States should provide universal access to quality prekindergarten programs, support parent engagement, act to extend learning time and work to ensure that families in all communities can address the health needs of students.

Communities, tribes, states and the federal government must work together to create a policy infrastructure for providing these services by crafting standards, parallel to K-12 education standards, for early childhood, expanded learning time, health care and health education, family engagement and at-risk children. They should explore options to limit the concentration of poor students in particular schools, and the federal government should provide incentives for states to do so. Schools serving high concentrations of low-income students should also undertake an annual needs assessment for each child to determine not only the student's academic needs, but also the particular additional supports and services that he or she needs for school success.

### Parent Engagement and Education

Most parents know they have a responsibility to be involved in their children's lives. Schools and communities also have an

obligation to support the engagement of all parents, guardians and caregivers in their children's education. Recognizing the barriers for low-income parents in playing a meaningful role in the lives of their children, or in school governance, we cannot expect that a middle-class paradigm of parent engagement is feasible in all cases. Nevertheless, to be accountable and successful, schools depend on feedback and engagement from their students' families, even if some of the parents are immigrants who speak another language (with little or no English) or hold down multiple jobs while they aspire to join the middle class.

Families play critical roles in their children's cognitive, social and emotional development from birth through adolescence, and family engagement is one of the strongest predictors of children's school success.<sup>84</sup> Positive family engagement includes helping students with homework, making sure students follow through on health treatments and get enough sleep at night, and communicating with and volunteering at the school. In addition, families can provide their children exposure to important cultural and educational experiences that support school success through visits to museums, libraries, theaters, concerts and community service opportunities. Children from high-poverty backgrounds are much less likely to experience these supportive practices. In addition, these families often lack access to the social and political networks that allow them to be effective advocates for their children.<sup>85</sup> The importance of parent involvement has been recognized by federal grant programs. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, for example, provided grants for Parental Information Resource Centers that helped implement school-parent partnerships programs,<sup>86</sup> and, through Title I, ESEA also provides for a 1

percent parent involvement set-aside for all districts that receive \$500,000 or more in Title I Basic Grants.<sup>87</sup>

The commission recommends that the federal government expand its support for parent engagement by—

- Establishing a grant program with incentives for states and localities to develop effective mechanisms for promoting broad-based parent education and a mutual sense of shared engagement between schools and parents; and.
- Based on the best practices developed through these grants, providing federal policy and financial support to help mount such programs in all of the states and in schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education.

Model programs eligible for these grants should cover some or all of the following activities:

- Parenting education (from prenatal and early parenting through parenting teens) and education for parents, as needed, in basic and advanced knowledge and skill areas, and in the rights, responsibilities and roles of parents with respect to their involvement and advocacy for their child's education *vis-à-vis* the schools.
- Professional development for mutual engagement between schools and families, including the incorporation of all parents, regardless of race, voting status or family income, in decision-making.
- Adult English-learner classes targeted to parents of enrolled students.

### New Partnerships Toward Common Goals<sup>88</sup>

In Cincinnati and two nearby Kentucky cities, Newport and Covington, the Strive Together Partnership has created a comprehensive, cradle-to-career system of support for its students. The partnership was organized in 2006 after a report showed that Ohio and Kentucky were falling behind other states in college-attainment rates. The need for reform was also underscored by a 2007 decision by the Ohio Supreme Court ruling that conditions in Ohio schools were inconsistent with requirements articulated in the state Constitution.

Strive brought together more than 300 partners from a variety of sectors in an effort to increase the global competitiveness of the local workforce. Strive's vision is that every student will: (1) be prepared for school; (2) be supported in and out of school; (3) succeed academically; (4) enroll in college or continuing education; and (5) graduate and enter a career. The partnership also has a constant focus on data and accountability, and it has created a set of indicators to closely monitor progress and report results on each goal. These data are published in an annual report card. Partners have agreed on these common goals and shared ways to measure success, creating an environment of collective responsibility for the results.

The Cincinnati Community Learning Centers Initiative (CLCI), a parallel effort to Strive, began in 2000, and has contributed to significant improvement in key indicators. The CLCI strategy brings together school and community partners at public schools to address the needs of high poverty students. It has transformed the educational experience in a number of Cincinnati schools.

The Oyler pre-K through grade 12 School began to become a Community Learning Center in 2002. Through its community partners Oyler now offers a health center, a vision clinic, dental services, mental health counseling and a range of family support services, after-school programs, food assistance, tutoring and mentoring, and adult education. Where Oyler previously had an 80 percent dropout rate by grade 10, by 2010 the school's graduation rate had risen to 82 percent, with daily attendance at 94 percent.

Wide improvement has also been seen among students in all Cincinnati Public Schools: kindergarten readiness has increased 9 percent, fourth-grade reading and math scores have increased 7 percent and 14 percent, respectively, and the high school graduation rate has risen by 11 percent. In addition, the first-to-second-year college-retention rate for local students increased 9 percent at the University of Cincinnati. The graduation rate for local students increased 7 percent—evidence of better college preparedness.

- Crisis counseling and support for families, including food, health, housing, transportation, financial assistance and child care.
- Effective communication between and among families, schools, early childhood centers, expanded learning providers, health providers and other learning contexts.

### Working with Communities to Meet Health Needs

Healthier students are better learners. Strategically planned and evidence-based school health programs and services have been shown to have a positive correlation with academic achievement. Taking thoughtful steps to make school-based health services accessible to high-poverty schools and districts and to remote schools and districts can result in healthier students, better educational achievement and lasting long-term physical and socioeconomic benefits.<sup>89</sup>

States need to substantially increase the availability of critical health services such as diagnosis and treatment of vision and hearing problems, asthma, dental care and mental health care in schools or through effective school-linked community services. Most low-income students are already eligible for Medicaid support for these services, but actual access and effective follow-up are often lacking, especially when working parents do not have the time or readily available transportation to bring their children to clinics or hospital emergency rooms where they can obtain treatment.

The commission, therefore, recommends that the federal government explore mechanisms for promoting effective health services in the schools by—

- Establishing a grant program with incentives for states and localities to develop mechanisms for providing basic health services to at-risk public school students, and providing sustainable sources of revenue for these programs in their state funding systems; and
- Providing incentives to states and to Bureau of Indian Education schools to broadly implement the best practices developed through these grants. In particular, programs should appoint full-time health coordinators in schools with large populations or concentrations of low-income students, and school-based health clinics should be established in areas that lack easy access to hospitals or community health clinics.

### Extended Learning Time

After-school, extended-day, summer and other extended-learning experiences can both stem learning loss and accelerate student achievement. Studies show that instructional time—measured as the time students are actually engaged in learning—and high-dosage tutoring are strong predictors of higher achievement.<sup>90</sup> High-quality after-school programs that are coordinated with the school's academic program have been found to result in meaningful positive effects on academic outcomes and significant improvements in educationally relevant attitudes and behaviors.<sup>91</sup>

Students from high-poverty backgrounds who do not take part in summer programs lose skills, particularly in mathematics, and this summer learning loss is cumulative, adding significantly to achievement gaps.<sup>92</sup> Worse still, decisions by states and districts to shorten the school year or day as a part of budget cuts fly in the face of excellence and equity.

Although for the past decade, the 21st Century Community Learning Center program, now part of the ESEA, has provided substantial support for after-school, summer and extended-day programs, there is a substantial unmet demand for these programs. In 2012 alone, more than \$1.2 billion in competitive grants was awarded under this program; this was still less than half of the \$2.5 billion that Congress has authorized for the program in recent years.

One approach that could help address this challenge is to fully fund the 21st Century Community Learning Center program, on a sustained basis, as an incentive program to encourage states to include sustained funding for qualified extended-learning-opportunity programs for low-income students in their state funding systems.<sup>93</sup> A qualified program, for example, might provide the following—

- High-quality after-school and extended-day programs that operate for at least three hours per day, five days a week, and high-quality summer and vacation programs that operate for at least eight hours per day for six to eight weeks.
- Program content that includes cultural, athletic, academic, civic, community service and other enrichment activities.
- Appropriate programs and services for English-language learners and for students with disabilities.
- An adequate staff composed of appropriately qualified, trained, compensated and caring adults.
- Adequate facilities, and sufficient equipment and enough instructional supplies and
- Safe and accessible transportation.

### At-Risk Student Populations

Schools' very first priority for all students should be to make every effort to keep them in school and progressing toward high school graduation. In concert with the points that are made in the sections on parent engagement, health and social services, and extended learning opportunities, the commission recommends the following—

- Federal and state governments should work together to develop and fund effective programs that increase the chances that at-risk students will graduate.
- States, in developing their finance formulas, should support implementation of dropout-prevention programs and high-quality alternative education to provide appropriate educational settings for those students who have not been successful in traditional learning environments.

### Extending Learning Time in Massachusetts

In the fall of 2006, Massachusetts began an innovative program to ensure students' learning needs were met. Expanded Learning Time (ELT) started with 10 public schools opening their doors to a dramatically expanded school day—nearly 5,000 students were given approximately two extra hours per day to learn. These schools redesigned their school day from the ground up, adding time for core academics, enrichment courses, and teacher planning and professional development.

Today, 19 public schools, serving 10,500 students in nine districts, have taken the important step of expanding the school schedule for every student to improve academic performance and reintroduce students to enrichment programs that have too often been stripped from the school day.

Funded by the state and overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, ELT schools, having competed for state dollars, receive \$1,300 per pupil to implement their expanded learning time plan. Additionally, the program has negotiated agreements with teachers' unions to increase pay for the additional hours and work.<sup>94</sup>

On December 3, 2012, Massachusetts, along with four other states, the Ford Foundation, and the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL), announced the TIME (Time for Innovation Matters in Education) Collaborative, an initiative to further the development of high-quality and sustainable expanded-learning-time schools.<sup>95</sup>

- States should be encouraged to reform their rules pertaining to school discipline, where appropriate, to ensure local districts and charter schools provide preventive services in the first instance; if formal discipline is necessary, afford students and their families ample due process; and require high-quality alternative education for any student expelled or removed from a traditional school setting.<sup>96</sup>
- Local school boards should ensure that enrollment and assignment policies promote equity. When considering how to reassign groups of students within a district when a school is closed, for example, school boards should ensure that schools receiving new students have the capacity to meet the educational needs of those students.
- Schools should champion effective dropout-prevention programs, targeting at-risk students.

## V. Governance and Accountability to Improve Equity and Excellence

Government at every level should implement a multi-year strategy for advancing national equity and excellence goals using a combination of incentives and enforcement. The federal government must be clearer about our national expectations for student outcomes, insist on realistic but aggressive state plans to meet them, allocate resources to level the playing field across states and districts, and require that states implement those plans well.

Our system of education governance—the how, by whom and for whom of policymaking and accountability—is often complex, convoluted and outdated. Although the U.S. approach to education governance allows for a measure of flexibility and experimentation through local control, many aspects of the system were designed for 19th- and mid-20th-century needs and circumstances. Our accountability mechanisms, moreover, emphasize compliance with bureaucratic rules rather than meeting meaningful goals for excellence and equity. These two factors contribute to the pernicious gap between what we want for our children and what we provide for them. The closure of this gap must drive our decisions about education from the Capitol to the classroom and shape the design of our systems of accountability.

### Governing for Equity

We need a system in which the values of fairness and inclusion inform the roles of each level of government and in which research and sound educational judgments, rather than custom, drive reform. Educators, bolstered by a strong program of educational research, must be free to responsibly innovate to boost student learning. Our evolving vision for governance should include clear guidelines regarding the roles and responsibilities of all players, as we discussed in section II of this report, *Teaching, Leading and Learning Opportunities*.

Together, states and local districts plan and operate schools. This allows innovation to flourish and states and communities to do what is best for their unique circumstances. Nonetheless, because our students' educational achievement has national consequences, both economically and socially, the federal government must play a leadership role in helping states and districts in this task. In addition, our patchwork system of local, regional, state and federal bureaucracies has struggled to set clear student achievement goals, establish clear lines of responsibility and allocate funding fairly or equitably. The current system, in which policy and resource decisions are made across 15,000 local school boards, 50 state legislatures and state education agencies,

plus three branches of the federal government, is not serving national goals of equity and excellence and is not meeting the needs of far too many children in too many communities.

Historically, our approach to local control has often made it difficult to achieve funding adequacy and educational equity. Local authority will inevitably remain substantial, but it should operate within a clearer, stronger framework that aligns local decisions with state policies and with national commitments to equity and excellence.

To ensure that every child receives what he or she needs to succeed in school, we require a systemic means of cutting through the red tape that ties up funding streams and personnel. Governance reforms must ensure coordination and cooperation across federal, state and local agencies. This alignment is critical, for example, when it comes to providing health care and social services to students in our schools. The recent example of governors collaborating to create the Common Core State Standards is instructive as a collaborative cross-governmental model.

### The Federal Role

For the past 60 years, from the dismantling of Jim Crow school segregation to the competitive incentive grants of today, the federal role in education has developed steadily. In this era, the main federal focus has been on addressing inequities of opportunity. For a number of reasons, including local control and resource considerations, this familiar federal concern has not produced acceptable results in student outcomes. In addition to providing inadequate supports for states and districts and too few incentives or rewards, the federal government has also imposed ineffective sanctions on states and districts for their failure to realize the equity and excellence commitments that routinely are a condition of federal funding.

Although a stronger equity framework for education governance can be shaped today using existing federal statutes and regulations, political will and enforcement budgets have for

### Fiscal Smoothing

The commission recommends exploring policy options for the federal government to help states *hold harmless* students—and their futures—from the effects of recessions. The recent economic recession revealed a major obstacle for the ambitious changes we urge. Volatile state and local revenues over the business cycle create a budget roller coaster for districts. This undermines the consistency of policies and of investments that are essential to narrow our equity and excellence gaps.

One approach to consider would be allowing states the option of getting an advance on future federal money, with *automatic* repayment to the federal treasury, post-recession, using pre-agreed multiyear reductions in federal funding they would otherwise receive. (Repayment would be drawn, again by pre-agreement with the state, from programs unrelated to equity, even from outside of education.) Participation could be limited to states that satisfy certain policy or outcome standards with respect to progress in equity and excellence.

This budget smoothing has possible drawbacks, including reduced discipline for states and slightly more complexity in national fiscal policy.

decades been insufficient to the task. Government at every level should implement a multiyear strategy for advancing national equity and excellence goals using a combination of incentives and enforcement. In particular, the federal government should minimize the volatility of education spending and provide a stable funding mechanism that can consistently meet the educational needs of low-income students. This can be done by creating a federal loan program for states that are prioritizing—and sustaining—funding streams for low-income students, even during economic downturns.

Working with the governors and other stakeholders,<sup>97</sup> the federal government must be clearer about our national expectations for student outcomes; insist on realistic but aggressive state plans to meet them; allocate resources to level the playing field across states, districts and schools; and require that states implement those plans well. Although controversial, this is the clearest and most certain way to move beyond inspiring rhetoric and hollow promises to focus the nation on where we must go and chart our progress getting there.

Effective governance means sound policy choices, which require widely disseminated and readily available data, research, experimentation and evaluation. The federal government obviously has primary responsibility, but it does far too little given the urgent challenges. For these reasons, [the commission recommends](#) that the federal government do the following—

- Develop policies that give states and school districts incentives to pursue legal and feasible means to promote racially and socioeconomically diverse schools. Because racially diverse schools can be a benefit to all enrolled students and can help students prepare to live and work productively in a diverse society, the federal government should also continue to support racial diversity as part of a broader equity agenda.

- Along with states, provide assistance to districts and schools that are becoming more diverse, and help districts champion and benefit from that diversity.
- Develop a national research and development strategy that includes advancing education technology; identifying the most effective and efficient place-based practices; improving dramatically the dissemination of research and promising practices across states and districts; the effective use of applied and programmatic research on learning and instructional strategies; advancing assessments of student achievement and instructional practices; effective teacher preparation and continuing professional development; education administration; and international comparisons.

### State and Local Governance

Legally speaking, local units of government, including school districts, are entirely creations of the state, controlled by state statutes and constitutions. School districts take many forms, with tremendous variance in size and structure. Twenty six states have fewer enrolled students than the Los Angeles Unified School District;<sup>98</sup> other districts have only one or two schools serving remote rural communities.

The states are ultimately responsible for school districts that are too small and inefficient, chronically underperforming or mismanaged. States, however, can advance the interests of equity and excellence far beyond intervention in troubled districts. These measures are detailed elsewhere in this report. A critical first step in realizing these recommendations is the creation of far greater capacity at the state level.<sup>99</sup> This means building expertise with research-based best practices in all relevant fields, increasing access to training and extraordinary funding where needed and using professional development funds to strengthen school leadership. Increased state capacity goes hand-in-hand with greater state responsibility for the more ambitious goals we propose.

On a local level, school boards are, at least theoretically, positioned to offer democratically elected representation with the added advantages of expertise and nonpartisanship. However, in some communities the existence of locally elected boards has not ensured that all relevant interests are represented sufficiently. In practice, single-issue governing structures like school boards may actually hinder political accountability because the decision-makers on those boards may not be fully representative of the parents of schoolchildren—particularly the neediest children—in the district.

Direct mayoral control of schools is also no panacea. Although in some places mayoral control appears to have made an important difference and focused public accountability, in other places, mayoral politics or indifference would have stymied reforms that were ultimately carried out by school boards and able superintendents.

Such local difficulties in governance are also, ultimately, the responsibility of the states. States not only have the responsibility

to provide equitable funding, but they also have an affirmative obligation to ensure that funding reaches students in the classroom to enable them to achieve rigorous academic standards. To satisfy this obligation, [the commission recommends](#) that states—

- Develop mechanisms—along with increased organizational capacity and expertise—to intervene when districts and schools are in fiscal crisis or when they chronically and consistently fail to provide quality educational resources to ensure students graduate from high school ready for college and careers. These interventions—which should include providing high-quality technical assistance, necessary resources, and supports and direction to ensure equity and excellence—may also include such measures as directing the reallocation of resources within budgets, requiring the restructuring of curriculum, directing implementation of effective programs, requiring changes in enrollment policies, assuming direct governance responsibility and establishing high-quality, alternative public school choice options (within or across districts).
- Establish a process for replacing chronically ineffective school boards with oversight boards or special masters when weak governance is clearly contributing to a district’s persistent underperformance. States can also improve political accountability at the local level, by, for example, requiring that school board elections be held at the same time as general elections. This will be especially helpful in districts with chronically low voter participation in school board elections.

**Regionalization.** Regionalization—whether it is the sharing of administrative and other costs and capacities among districts, the creation of larger districts or the effective use of technology—may allow districts to provide educational services in a more cost-effective and efficient manner and allow them to invest their limited resources in improved teaching and learning opportunities. Regionalization, particularly at the secondary level, may also allow districts to improve educational programming by providing advanced coursework, opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and enhanced electives necessary for college and career readiness.

Regionalization can broaden districts’ tax bases and support funding equity, leading to higher student achievement. Montgomery County, Maryland—a wealthy Washington, D.C., suburb with pockets of poverty—is a good example. Regionalization can also lead to greater opportunities for interdistrict enrollment and school choice. Such changes mean impassioned debates, but our traditional localism remains so strong that it is now, on balance, an obstacle to efficient, equitable, excellent education.

**Charters and Choice.** Because charter schools are an important and growing part of our public school system, it is incumbent on the states to monitor performance and to figure out ways to ensure good outcomes—in both traditional and charter schools. From the first charter schools in Minnesota in 1991, 4 percent

### A Perspective on Governance from Indian Country

In the United States, tribal governments are sovereigns that have a direct government-to-government relationship with the federal government and states. This principle, enshrined in the Constitution, ensures that any decisions made affecting tribes, with regard to their property and citizens, must be made with tribal participation and consent. Thus, determining the best educational opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students must include direct involvement from tribes and their communities.

Today, approximately 93 percent of Native children are enrolled in public schools, both urban and rural. The remaining 7 percent attend schools within the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) system.<sup>100</sup> Regardless of where they attend school, Native students frequently do not receive an education steeped in their language or culture. They are also very unlikely to receive instruction in an appropriate classroom or school climate.

Tribes, Native parents and communities are best suited to influence these critical factors for academic success. Thus, creating an educational system that honors local, tribal control over the education of our citizens is essential.

of all students now attend more than 6,000 charter schools. Charter schools are quite varied in their mission, operations and performance. They are all public schools that receive varying funding from state, local, federal and philanthropic sources. The underlying concept is that they may offer an alternative to the local school district and that they depend upon sufficient enrollment to meet their expenses. In most states, they must have open enrollment and be nonselective, relying on admission lotteries when oversubscribed.

Supporters note four potential benefits to charter schools. First, they are generally expected to promote innovation, since they are authorized to adopt approaches to curriculum, hiring patterns and other matters that are different from the practices of public schools in their district. This innovation in some cases has also extended to the use of technology, the flexible staffing of schools and an emphasis on non-cognitive aspects of their training. Second, they are intended to offer some amount of choice to parents and students over the school they attend. Third, they are intended to offer competition for the traditional public schools and provide an incentive to the traditional schools to improve. Fourth, they are proposed as a potential educational reform for underserved students and communities. While charter schools are likely to remain part of the educational landscape, they remain controversial in many ways. Additionally, each of the 44 states with charters have different policy regimes and regulatory requirements and have had varying success with the charter sector.

Charter schools have had their clearest overall success in providing choice to parts of the population that have not found choosing school easy or feasible. In particular, while some families exercise considerable choice over the schools their children attend through residential location decisions, many others, particularly those facing financial constraints, have limited options. We have

seen that charter schools disproportionately serve low-income communities and communities of color—two groups that have had more limited alternative choice mechanisms.

The largest area of controversy about charter schools remains their impact on student performance.<sup>101</sup> Even while it is very difficult to make generalizations across states and districts, it is becoming increasingly clear that there are wide differences in performance across charters and across states.<sup>102</sup> Some of the very best schools, particularly for serving disadvantaged populations, are charter schools. Yet, many charters are providing poorer academic performance than alternative public schools serving the same populations.<sup>103</sup>

One of the most significant areas of state experimentation in public education over the past two decades has been the authorization of charter schools as an alternative means of governing public schools at the local level. It is important that the federal and state governments undertake research and evaluation in this area to understand better the effects of charters on equity and access under different policies and in different contexts.

### Rethinking and Redesigning Accountability

Since desegregation, federal power has been a lever to promote equity in resources, that is, inputs. But there have always been serious flaws. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) sought to ensure that students were taught by “highly qualified teachers,” but many districts have made little or no progress in increasing low-income students’ access to highly qualified teachers. Most states have increased oversight and management of school districts and schools, required partly by federal law and partly by their own laws, but these efforts have a disappointingly mixed record. Our current approach has produced a great amount of data, and a greatly increased number of regulations, but an insufficient amount of overall progress.

It is time to rethink *what* accountability entails and *how* it is designed and implemented to promote not just excellence, but also equity. The next generation of accountability systems must be smart, fair and transparent so that educational opportunities and outcomes improve.

A complete system will focus in a coordinated way on resources and outcomes stretching from early childhood programs all the way to high school graduation and readiness for college or career. Tests and other assessment tools should reflect the best psychometric science and the important abilities students need to master—including writing, complex problem-solving, research and inquiry. As in other high-achieving nations, this requires government investment, not just business opportunities for test publishers. Good assessment policies don’t come automatically. Just with respect to students, for example, we need multiple broad measures of student outcomes for all students and student subgroups, including achievement and achievement growth; attendance rates; graduation rates; participation and performance in advanced courses; college- and career-readiness rates; and

preparation for citizenship.

A complete system will also take into account the engagement and involvement of parents and guardians in the education of their children. Federal and state officials should also act to improve meaningful parent engagement. In communities with low levels of parental participation or low performance on a “parent engagement index,” districts should be required to fully inform parents and guardians and engage them in school decisions, including in plans to improve educational outcomes and provide equitable access to needed inputs.

We need comparable care in designing accountability for teachers, principals, school boards and states. Why? Because accountability systems must also measure how well schools, districts and states support the success of students with resources such as equitable funding; the quality, distribution and performance of teachers and principals; the availability of high-quality instructional materials; access to rigorous courses and curricula necessary to meet high standards; enrichment opportunities; adequate facilities; and fair discipline practices.

Of course, consequences can’t be based on a snapshot. We should expect a continuous improvement model in which schools, districts and states evaluate performance over time—retaining programs and policies that are shown to be effective in bringing about equity and excellence and discarding those that do not. Where underperformance is chronic, affirmative steps must be taken, including by the federal government, to ensure that students are being well supported.

While we disagree on some details of design, we do agree that a redesigned system should meet these criteria—

- Accountability for equity and excellence should focus on opportunities and resources, as well as on student outcomes,<sup>104</sup> with the relative emphasis depending on the target of the accountability.
- Actors at every level should be empowered and held responsible according to their role, from students and teachers all the way up to state and federal policymakers.
- Accountability should use multiple broad measures that fairly reflect the decisions or performance of students, educators, schools and systems; the system requires effective, comprehensive data systems.
- Accountability systems should focus attention on students at all achievement levels—not just the bottom—so that policies raise the roof as well as the floor.
- Accountability systems should foster collaboration among all parties responsible for student learning.
- Accountability must mean both supports and consequences: a mix of incentives and interventions that generate action to improve equity and excellence.

- Accountability systems must focus attention and action on subgroups of students that have not been served well by schools.
  - Accountability systems should reflect pragmatic, non-ideological assumptions about how individuals and bureaucracies respond to incentives based on markets, politics, information disclosure, professionalism or public participation.
  - Accountability should not be rendered ineffective because of lackadaisical, underfunded or politically timid oversight.
  - The system must provide, at all levels of government, clear and usable information for the public.
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## Conclusion

In America, we believe that fate is not fixed by the circumstances of birth. The surest guarantor of this ideal is educational opportunity—the birthright of each and every child. For so many children today, and many more to come, these American values are made hollow by our failure to ensure equity and excellence throughout our system of public education. For each child, only health and the love of family are more important. Our nation as a whole faces few challenges so critical or so fundamental; the achievement gaps we have described weaken the country internationally, economically and morally.

We have offered an interrelated set of recommendations based on research and experience. We have looked beyond near-term political and budget calculations to propose a direction forward that we hope, respectfully, can help guide reformers over the next several years, whether they work in the nation’s capital, statehouses, school board rooms or classrooms. If we can agree on the basic strategy—the right direction to reach our goals—then we will be able to combine and focus the energies of teachers, their unions, business leaders and parents.

States and local districts will, as always, share the primary authority for delivering education, but the federal government must take more seriously its profoundly important responsibility to assist and encourage states and districts, and, if necessary, ameliorate resulting inequities. For this reason, the commission believes that our shared national goals may require a stronger federal role in governance and accountability within the general framework

of a partnership with states, districts and schools. School-level professionals must also have a voice.

Policy details are important, but moral and political determination are vital. We must avoid a future that continues to consign millions of poor children to inadequate schools lacking the great teachers and principals they need. We hope to kindle a sense of urgency that is both passionate and compassionate, keeping our eyes on the prize, instead of distracting ourselves in searches for villains and celebrations of heroes.

In the minds of our citizens and immigrants, and in the imagination of billions worldwide, the United States is built on the principle of great and equal opportunities. Facing enormous demographic change and international competition, the urgent task is to remake our education system to meet the demands of justice and the tests of competition. Americans need only recommit ourselves to the values that stir our hearts and inspire the world.

Following through on the National Equity and Excellence Commission—

# FOR EACH AND EVERY CHILD

A STRATEGY FOR EDUCATION EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE



A Proposal to the XXX Foundation

Regents of the University of California  
University of California, Berkeley, School of Law  
Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law and Social Policy

Tuesday, April 15, 2014

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**For Each and Every Child** (EEC) continues the work of the National Commission on Equity and Excellence. Its broad mission is to further that Commission’s consensus policy principles and strategy, and to support policy change aligned with that substantive strategy. EEC’s work in the near term will focus on three programs: (1) dissemination and recruiting allies; (2) building a network of resource-rich “hubs” defined by either geography (e.g., California) or issue (Common Core implementation); and (3) technical assistance, especially to design detailed policy changes. (Please see Attachment A: EEC Prospectus.) EEC is a project of the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute for Law and Social Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law.

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## Introduction: Advancing Excellence for Each and Every Child

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### ► Background

We request support for the Phase I work of *For Each and Every Child*, or **EEC**, a project to build on the work of the National Equity and Excellence Commission (2011-13). ... Our primary goal is to provide a critical piece of the infrastructure necessary for building a broad, collaborative, multi-sector community working to advance a shared vision of excellence for all.

...

After two years of deliberation, drafting and negotiation, the Commission unanimously adopted over 50 pages of analysis and recommendations. The report included a clarion call to action, and five “baskets” encompassing scores of evidence-based policy principles, proffered as guidance for a decade or more of struggle to come.

This powerful consensus among important figures and organizations cried out for follow-on work of some kind. In the report, vision was followed by proposals. But now what? Our several months of broad consultations with former commissioners, other prominent organizations, additional policy thinkers, and several potential funders revealed a near-universal view that the consensus must be followed by organization and the recommendations by action. This EEC proposal responds to that felt urgency.

Because of the Commission’s policy work, this past year of consultation and planning asked how we and Partners might build infrastructure to align and knit a critical mass of elements in this enormously complex ecosystem—multiple levels of government, decentralized financing and governance, a dense population of often-rivalrous advocacy and service organizations, resource-starved researchers, and ideological wars.

...

### ► EEC: A coherent Confederation of Efforts

We know there are countless nonprofits already in this broadly-defined field. EEC will differentiate itself by promoting consensus and action on evidence-based policy and communication strategies that are aligned with the framework unanimously adopted by the Commission.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The report is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/documents.html>, or <http://foreachandeverychild.org/>.

We will continue to identify allies and assist decision makers and advocates working at the national, state and local levels who are dedicated to three bedrock values:

- Each child must get an instructional strategy effective for *that* child. This requires a school and school system with the necessary practices and resources: early childhood learning, effective teachers, capable principals, technology, wrap-around services, effective governance and robust accountability.
- Every child must benefit from systemic change, at scale, because it remains true that America should leave no child behind.
- Excellence and Equity must be inseparable endeavors because we will fail at each unless we pursue both.

We propose that a group of funders share responsibility for supporting the integrated pieces of a this vision and the accompanying extensive policy framework, using EEC (together with our Partners) as their instrument. The particulars of that framework will be drawn in the first instance from the policy consensus achieved by the Commission. Of course, the ideas will evolve and gain context-sensitive details as we collaborate with Partners and consider new evidence.

...

▶ ***Theory of Action: Justice and Opportunity  
Through a Decentralized Movement***

For decades now, the dominant engineering principles in initiatives to bring about systemic school improvement have been curriculum standards, accountability based on student tests, quasi-market incentives, shame-based public reporting and a refocusing of regulatory attention on outputs rather than inputs. The public value most often invoked, it seems, has been *Prosperity*, with *Competitiveness* its measure.

In comparison, the approach adopted by the national Commission and EEC involves five baskets of interrelated programmatic initiatives that are, taken as a whole, far less ideological and more nuanced in their understanding of institutions and of learning. Most important, each recommendation has *Opportunity* as its evident purpose, and *Fairness* its performance standard.

...

It is often remarked that educators and their immediate leaders are victims of an unceasing barrage of “reforms” dropped from on high, generally with narrow, uncoordinated purposes. The Commission’s work, however, was both comprehensive and coherent. The vision and recommendations reflect an understanding that structures, organizations and fundamental

conditions matter—that *systems* must change, not just isolated practices. Of course, no single change agent or funder can be active across the entire range of challenges. But this only underscores the importance of the plural, distributed model adopted for EEC. We can act systemically and boldly, addressing the fundamental issues, with unrelenting pragmatism.

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## Grant Activities

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The right investment of resources and support can catalyze education policy discussion and movement-building throughout the country. To this end, EEC with its partners will design or recruit, and then support **hubs**, *defined by either geography or issue*. Each hub will be a collaborative community of researchers, NGOs, policy experts and others committed to our vision of excellence for each and every child. A well-staffed **network** will facilitate the hubs as they cross-pollinate across issues and regions, sharing ideas, resources and strategies and community. More specifically, during this grant period, EEC will have three programs, or lines of business: (See *Figure 1*)

- **Recruiting and Dissemination:** Strategic recruiting of endorsers, allies and resource Partners; creating print and multimedia materials tailored for specific subjects, audiences and contexts; and putting together convenings and briefings to familiarize leaders with pertinent education facts and our framework of values and policies.
- **The Network of Hubs:** Linking allies, efforts, and resources by building a staffed network of hubs, each based on geography or a policy focus. Hubs, and lively well-staffed connections between them, embody our hypothesis of how best to build an infrastructure to encourage and support the education advancement community in moving together over the next several years, and doing so in alignment with a comprehensive, evidence-based policy strategy. (Details are in the following pages.)

*The network of hubs around the country will be EEC’s principal means of promoting evidence-based policy change by forming, connecting and serving coalitions of key actors and communities.*

- **Policy Engineering Capacity Assistance:** EEC and our Partners, with assistance from contractors, will provide support for hub participants with: policy engineering and various forms of technical assistance reflecting nuances of the “client’s” context and policy commitments (e.g., drafting legislation or regulations, evaluating an official’s proposal, or finding and interpreting useful new research results); and communications counseling and other forms of capacity augmentation or development.

The work within all three lines of business will be scalable as to policy domains and jurisdictions, depending on foundation support and Partner interest.

*By “Partners” we mean organizations and thought leaders who go beyond the commitment of endorsers or allies. Partners will contribute in-kind resources to support the Hub. Recruiting Partners is especially important for EEC’s work. Whenever possible, we will tap partner organizations for pro bono, in-kind, and contract services. By leveraging the expertise and capacity of partners, EEC can maintain a small footprint and the low visibility appropriate for infrastructure.*

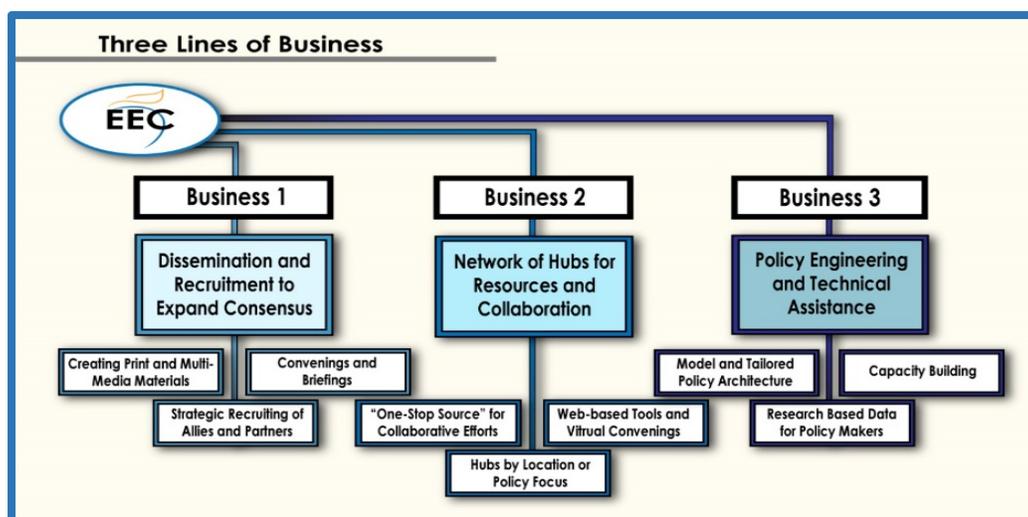
For example, the D.C.-based Alliance for Excellent Education might be the right group to partner with us in convening and managing a national hub focused on implementation of the Common Core State Standards—a subject area to which they are already deeply committed. The Center for Civil Rights at UNC Chapel Hill might lead a national hub on school discipline, while also catalyzing the formation of geo-hubs in North Carolina and South Carolina. The Coalition for Community Schools might take its 240 affiliates as a foundation for a national hub tackling issues of wrap-around services to mitigate poverty. **Appendix D** provides examples of organizations we will approach during Phase I to discuss Partner affiliations, which will be memorialized in MOUs.

Finally, as a UC Berkeley-based project, EEC will be led by its Principal Investigator, Professor Christopher Edley, Jr. By design, three advisory committees will play a major role in setting direction and priorities for the project: the Partners Committee, the Donors Committee, and the Researchers Committee. The latter will steer our quality assurance process so that fidelity to evidence remains a vital value in EEC’s work.

► Hub Strategy Details

EEC will help build the capacity of our allies and hub members by providing them with

Figure 1



*Each and Every Child: A Proposal to the XXX Foundation*

sophisticated policy engineering, model legislation or technical assistance that is aligned with our policy framework and reflects the nuances of the community and the issue.

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### ▶▶ *Hub Services from EEC and Network Partners*

The EEC infrastructure strategy requires that hub participants derive important benefits from their participation. The hub, with needed support from EEC and our network of Partners, will provide the following services, based on the strategy and capacity of a hub's participants:

- Support for consensus-building and information-sharing on policy issues, research agendas, advocacy campaigns, communications strategies; coalition development.
- Organized sub-communities of learning and practice.
- Communications, tailored and as-needed, including: basic messaging that will meet hub partner-demands for a user-friendly, evidence-based resource for advancing equity and excellence; tools, training, and convenings to educate and persuade.
- Internal capacity-building in a wide range of operational and substantive domains, drawing on EEC staff resources but especially those of partners.
- Connectedness among Hub participants, including: shared vision and policy goals; opportunities for coalition activity; learning communities around particular policy issues or research; Web-based communication, social networking, and convening.
- Connectedness with the network of other hubs, providing: two-way sharing, learning, and collaboration; ultimately, a sense of identity as a movement.
- Policy engineering and technical assistance to advance changes in public policy at all levels of government and education administration.
- A platform for concerted action.

...

For our initial Hub effort, we are building upon [our] convening held at UC Berkeley on February 28, 2014. This provides a core group of individuals and organizations to recruit as Hub participants, and establishes most elements of our initial agenda. As participation in the Hub grows, we will establish sub-Hubs for each of these elements after consultation with the advisory committees of Partners and Donors. Ultimately, with other funding, participants will want additional sub-Hubs. This would be strong evidence that the Hub is working. So, more specifically the work to build our initial Hub includes:

1. Invite initial participants, using the lists generated by the February 28 LCCF/Common Core Research and evaluation convening.
2. Provide background briefing on EEC framework in issue-specific or regional contexts.
3. Achieve consensus on first and second-tier priorities.

4. Achieve loose consensus on additional participant invitations.

Eventually, invitees will include education advocacy organizations and professional associations; unions; civil, human rights, and social justice organizations; elected and appointed officials, or expert staff representatives; and associations of other stakeholders, including parents and business. (Hub participants will undoubtedly engage a still broader group for specific policy campaigns requiring broad-based activism.)

Once we have formally constituted the Hub, with general agreement on near-term goals, we will assist participants in developing a tactical plan to refine and then pursue their policy goals concerning school finance, common core, extended learning and early childhood. This plan will include a division of labor among participants, but will also identify the several forms of support that the Hub wants from EEC. In turn, EEC will mobilize the needed capacity from its staff, partners, communications, and other consultants, and the broader network of Hubs. More specifically:

5. Create planning teams within the Hub(s), supported by EEC and partners, to create tactical plans for each policy initiative, beginning with the three priorities.
6. With EEC support, reach Hub consensus on the tactical plans and the resource inventory needed to execute it: communications, policy engineering, research tasks, legal work, etc.

Building the Hub(s) will also entail some tasks concurrent with those above:

7. Establish effective means of communication and collaboration within the Hub.
8. Establish useful connections with other Hubs, and with EEC partners.
9. Assist the Hub in formulating a provisional (i.e., temporary) consensus statement of objectives and evaluation plans, which in every case we will share with EEC's advisory committees.

This abstract list is artificially linear, of course. It does not capture the continuous process of revision and correction, or the waxing and waning of the Hub's ambition as circumstances change. That said, creating and driving the Hub will require committed, flexible staff work by EEC, with the assistance of California and national partners. We will support this Hub using funds from various sources.

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▶▶ **Expanding the Network of Hubs**

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[W]e know that EEC will in Phase I address at least five key areas, and more if resources permit:

**On Teaching, Curriculum, Common Core:** The Commission was unanimous in noting the critical role of the Common Core State Standards as a foundation for achieving excellence for all, but this will be true only if its implementation is effective for all. All children deserve teachers who have been supported in the mastery of new standards, and implementation of the Common Core must be implemented not as just a Band-Aid-with-new-tests. The most effective implementation will often encompass whole-school redesign of how teachers interact, how instruction is delivered, how extended learning time is shaped, how technology is used, and more.

**On School Finance:** As the Commission recommended, states should identify and report on the programs and resources needed to provide all students with a meaningful education, ensuring that their systems of funding schools are supported by stable and predictable sources of revenue. With the recently legislated Local Control Funding Formula, California may be on its way to truly delivering meaningful additional resources where most needed, for its most vulnerable students. The Hub participants will develop informed responses to problems and opportunities arising during implementation of the school finance reform.

The Commission also recommended that states should develop information systems that will track student achievement based on their needs and access to resources, and align accountability systems as such, as well as ensure funding for extended learning time. This Hub will also address these matters.

The Commission also urged that states and districts must adopt best-practice models for evaluating teacher effectiveness and integrate those models into equity analyses and accountability systems for both teachers and administrators.

**On More & Better Learning Time:** Enhanced and extended learning time is a valuable resource and critical part of the equity toolkit. EEC will move forward connecting our geo-hubs to important work NGOs and researchers are already doing around the nation. We will enlist those already active in the field to be a hub in the EEC sense of the term, and work with them to increase policy, advocacy and resource attention to this critical aspect of education advancement.

**Wrap Around Services & Community Schools:** Similarly, there are at least two major national networks working on the school-community connection, comprised of thousands of local community and education leaders. Participation in the EEC network of hubs may help those groups move their experience toward systemic reform, nationwide.

**On Early Childhood Education:** The Commission's recommendations on early childhood education included a federal matching program to states to guarantee access to high-quality early learning programs for all low-income children within the next 10 years. Also proposed were alignment and coordination of federal early childhood programs (Head Start, Early Head Start, etc.) and similar coordination of federal, state, and local funding streams. State and local governments must have authority to coordinate services for their youngest

students. While we wait—and push—for Washington to move on this, many state legislators appear to be expressing an interest in implementing and coordinating programs to provide greater access and quality for our underserved youngest students. The likely focus of EEC activity would be the importance of implementing early childhood programs with fidelity to the research findings on the elements needed to dramatically narrow the readiness-to-learn disparities.

These are our planned subject area hubs. Geo-hubs remain tentative, beyond California. We will work carefully with our advisory committees to select additional jurisdictions and issues, subject to resource constraints.

Finally, it bears emphasis that EEC will neither displace nor compete with networks or coalitions already active in a particular jurisdiction or issue area. If the participation of EEC can in some way be helpful to them, or if they are otherwise willing to make common cause in this loose confederation, the work will be far better for it.

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## EEC's Distinctiveness

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### How Is EEC Distinctive?

- Infrastructure — low visibility, in the background
- Allies and Partners—a core element of the strategy
- Networked Hubs defined by issue, geography.
- Work at all levels—national, state, local; long timeframe
- Comprehensive, evidence-based agenda
- Provenance: critical partners, voices