



NCTI 2010 Innovators Conference

Key Issues in Education Policy

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Tuesday, November 16, 2010

Summary: New initiatives including the Common Core Standards and the Race to the Top assessment program are intended to transform the education systems to improve the outcomes of all learners.

Discussion

Joanne Weiss

- My job is to set the stage about what the administration's policies and priorities look like. As Karen and Kumar were saying earlier, by 2020, America once again is going to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. We are focused on high quality early learning and doing a lot of inter-agency work around this. Our priorities are
 - 1) adopting standards and assessments that are internationally benchmarked.
 - 2) developing human capital – recruiting and supporting quality teachers.
 - 3) building data systems.
 - 4) turning around the lowest achieving schools. About five percent of schools in country are failing abysmally —2,000 schools produce 60% of dropouts and 75% of dropouts of color. We need to turn these schools around in significant ways.
- College achievement is another agenda, focusing on college access and college completion.
- There is a lot of fragmentation across these different federal programs which has caused local education agencies to become very siloed. We want to organize along the priority areas regardless of the source of the funds.
- Accomplishments to date: a lot of activity so far and the jury is still out about what the results will look like for kids in terms of gains, narrowing achievement gaps, college rates.



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- Race to the Top (RTTT) had 46 states and DC compete, led them to develop comprehensive statewide agendas (a first for many of these states), and come up with a reform plan that was coherent and comprehensive. Formed collaborations to move the agendas forward whether or not they won RTTT.
- Many states took a hard look at the infrastructure and came up with laws that were more conducive with their education plans. Thirty-four states took legislative action; 38 states and DC signed on to common standards; 44 states are participating in assessment systems.
- Education has become much more of a national conversation. Local, state, or national level: education is on the front page a lot more than it used to be. Previously the Department would receive 200 public comments to proposed regulations; now getting thousands of comments. We want people passionately involved in education.
- Stimulus package kept 325,000 teachers in classrooms across the country who would not otherwise have been there.
- Looking forward to four big things:
 - 1) Reauthorize NCLB; have a blueprint of ESEA reauthorization; working over the coming year.
 - 2) Continue to support reform at state and local levels through both formula grant programs and competitive grant programs.
 - 3) Continue emphasis on strengthening and renewing teaching profession.
 - 4) Continue to work in higher education to boost college completion rates.

Dane Linn

- Spoke a little bit about the common core standards. Identified key characteristics:
 - 1) Initiative led by states and both NGA and CCSSO came together in Chicago to figure out whether or not this was a good idea.
 - 2) Guided by the best available evidence to determine what would be included in English/language arts and mathematics—foundational knowledge and skills necessary to be successful.
 - 3) Transparent and worked with other organizations. Worked with AFT, NEA, CGCS, business roundtable; asked organizations to bring a representative reviewing the standards with us.
 - 4) Ensure that states retain leadership role: what does the governance structure look like moving forward (e.g., updates, revisions, lesson plans)?; should be announced before the end of the year.



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- Hard to imagine 38 states have accepted, three have provisionally adopted, by end of month anticipate possibly two more. Will hit critical mass by the end of the year. A lot of work to get to this point, but the hard work will be starting soon in implementation.
- Have 29 new governors—largest turnover in NGA’s history.
 - 1) Educate new governors on what they [the Common Core Standards] are and what they are not.
 - 2) How do we use the economic crisis as an opportunity? How do we reach the economies of scale?
- Look forward: Data is going to be the name of the game. What do the interoperable data systems need to look like? How do we leverage those funds to develop seamless systems within early childhood, K-12, and postsecondary education? Data systems will be critical. Need to achieve efficiency and effectiveness. Need to ground these in the data. Need data to make sound policy decisions. Next is how to use the data. How do data change teacher behaviors?
- Five key areas for NGA focus:
 - 1) Evaluating the policy landscape; states often layer new policy on top of existing policy and don’t know the extent to which existing policies are successful; help states do the type of analysis around workforce, standards, preparation—take stock of the policies and which are effective. Where are you spending your money, both state and federal resources? How do you rethink the way in which you use those resources?
 - 2) Curriculum and instruction: standards are for all students and 60% of students have learning difficulties. How do we improve existing workforce and preparation programs to improve use of tools to work with these students? How do we provide tools in a more robust way?
 - 3) Student assessments: from states, we want to make sure the assessments are comparable with fair comparisons. Will work with the assessment consortia. How do we use the data from these assessments?
 - 4) New delivery models and new models of learning, like charter, stem, high-tech high.
 - 5) Think of better ways to support our teachers; new ways of delivery without watering down delivery.
- Last point about curriculum and instruction—need to show what proficient looks like for each of the standards. Have to show teachers what that proficiency looks like against the standards. But none of this can be achieved if we don’t look at the funding structures. Can’t implement standards without revising the funding structures or inequities between districts will remain.



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Michael Yudin

- Technology empowers: empowers teachers to personalize and engage, empowers students. Provides millions of kids with disabilities with access to the curriculum. Helps kids prepare for success in today's economy. Greater educational outcomes when high expectations are set and students have access to the general education system in the general education environment.
- Blueprint for reform is critical to improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Rigorous achievement standards are critical. High expectations are critical. We need reliable, valid, and fair assessments.
- We have seen tremendous movement toward college- and career-ready standards. Critical to close achievement gap, increase the numbers of students ready for college and career, and achieve president's goal for leading the world again by 2020.
- Assessment:
 - RTTT assessment program or "assessment 2.0." Department of Education awarded money to develop the PARC and SMARTER-balanced assessment consortia.
 - Both consortia developing assessments to provide information throughout the year. Will be designed from the start to test all students, including English learners and students with disabilities. Ensure proactive inclusion of accommodations. Work together to determine the definition of "English learner." Will know if students are on track for college and career readiness. Many of today's assessments rely on questions that are too easy and don't provide data until much later. New assessments will require students to apply knowledge and generalize learning. Provide information about academic progress.
 - Using computer-adaptive technologies. Allow focus on the specific content being assessed. Open source to allow for ongoing innovation in the field. Need flexible reporting platforms. Administer tests in many cases by computer.
 - Working on technical infrastructure for the assessments. Ready for implementation in 2014-2015 leaving room for adjustments.
- Awarded grants to two additional consortia through GSEG. For students with cognitive disabilities, alternate assessments will align with RTTT assessment programs.
- Both of these grant programs are essential in improving curriculum and instruction and focus on formative assessments and giving all students the opportunity to learn and achieve.



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Linda Roberts

- What we have here is an incredible set of opportunities. We really should be focusing on breakthrough learning. We want to transform the future. What we do well will ensure the future of our country.
- Do we have the right goals and right vision? No question we do.
- One of the most important areas the Department of Education—and hopefully ESEA reauthorization—is addressing is the way we structure programs and the flow of money. The real fight is not the money but what we will do to make the system we have flexible and nimble. We have to do this or else we will be overcome—we have never been nimble in our education structures.
- Finally, we can't forget that what we're trying to do has to be done by people. By the learners, give them more responsibilities. By parents, community leaders, etc. Companies are very hopeful that common standards and new assessments are truly going to be transformative.
- The last thing is most difficult to think about: the policies we build, we really have to understand that they ought to be driven by the new social and cognitive world we are involved in and one that is driven by technology. This conference brings those worlds together in very powerful ways.
- Question to all of you: what are you going to do to set priorities, to go after this change, to go after the transformation, and to support the kind of work this administration is really after? If we do it right, we end up with an army in the field working with us.

Discussion and Q & A

Question from Patricia Almond (University of Oregon): Focus back on data-driven decisions and turning around low achieving schools. Not a lot about evaluation. There are inferences about student achievement. How will we know when we get there, to this place that you envision? And how will we track the unanticipated consequences? Reason I ask is that we haven't talked about the criteria. Right goals and vision, right data, right world participation. What are the right data?

- **Joanne Weiss:** I think we are focused much more on the individual student's learning gains. The vision of a new assessment system keyed to a common set of standards is that the assessments measure that and be adaptive enough to know where a student is to take into account growth and to provide ongoing feedback and information to teachers, students, and parents so they can narrow-cast for particular students.

Follow up from Patricia Almond: What are the criteria that will be used?

- **Joanne Weiss:** Rolling up individual student growth is the criteria we will be using.



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Question from Tracy Gray (Director, National Center for Technology Innovation): Can you speak about how this will work in terms of the budget crisis that schools are facing and the potential impact on these initiatives?

- **Joanne Weiss:** No question we'll need to figure out how to do more with less. The question is do you do that in a way that is retrograde or do you take on reform at the same time? We're trying to talk about both in the same sense: status quo is not acceptable. Also are trying very thoughtfully to educate ourselves and provide a variety of tools to identify ways in which we can be more productive.
- **Michael Yudin:** We are looking at how we can play a different role to address the real needs of districts and states, move away from compliance to technical support and capacity building.
- **Linda Roberts:** Dane left, but one of things he alluded to was the different ways in which states interpret regulations and policies. Notion of building capacity, sharing knowledge. You ought to be able to get data, information, strategy, and "what next" in a much easier and more reliable way. Part of this change has to be change at every level. Challenge for ED is how you communicate that it is a different world.

Question from Mike Haney (National Science Foundation): The holy grail is embedding these assessments, but that can't be done just through open source. It takes a very active plan. Has this been thought through? Everyone wants to embed assessment in schools, but the process in doing that seems quite difficult.

- **Joanne Weiss:** Both proposals built in formative, interim, and summative assessments and around it they built big curriculum frameworks. We'll see...it's a lot they bit off.

Follow up from Mike Haney (National Science Foundation): Is the hope that since they have the frameworks that a publisher will be able to embed their curriculum?

- **Joanne Weiss:** That remains to be seen. A lot remains to be seen about how these consortia products will unfold. But those are the right questions.

Comment: What is the vision around the role and purpose of embedded assessment? The closer the assessment is to the instruction and the ability to inform the teacher, the better. If you agree that this is the purpose, then the consortia's role in developing the formative assessments divorces it from the embedded purpose.

Comment from Tracy Gray (Director, National Center for Technology Innovation): The question that Linda raised: how are we all going to be involved? Karen also mentioned how are we going to be engaged? We need to carry what we have learned here and move forward.