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LEADERS OF A NEW COMMISSION ON SKILLS OF THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE OUTLINE “10 STEPS TO WORLD-CLASS SCHOOLS” - A “NATIONAL WORLD CLASS SCHOOLS ACT”

The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) has begun a new initiative, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, at this time of U.S. and global economic distress. Leaders of this effort include Marc Tucker, president of the NCEE; William Brock, U.S. Secretary of Labor under President Ronald Reagan; and Ray Marshall, U.S. Secretary of Labor under President Jimmy Carter.

They share a concern based upon data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), that the United States has fallen in global rankings from having the “best educated workforce” during the post-World War II era, to a number 12 ranking presently.

The leaders of this new Commission worry that “today’s younger generation is the first to be less educated than the preceding one.” They argue that decades of incremental U.S. education policies and maintaining the status quo, relatively speaking, have not led to improved performance. Instead, performance has remained “flat” while costs have risen.

The trio of New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce leaders, have proposed a “National World Class Schools Act.” They believe the approach taken in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which they view as “getting our lowest-performing students to minimum standards,” is insufficient. So they have come up with a set of actions that they believe States should be required to take, in order to receive federal education funds.

Under the “National World Class Schools Act” proposal, States would take the following actions:

1. Raise Teacher Licensing Standards

Top performing nations of the world set teacher licensing standards at high levels to recruit college graduates ranked in the top one-third of their graduating class, and they do not waive the standards even when there are teacher shortage areas by subject or location (math/science, inner city or rural). An assumption is, that under this plan, pay for teachers also would rise.

2. Recruit Top Students Into Teaching. Treat Them As Professionals.

Put teachers in charge of their schools not in dead-end jobs.

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3. Reward Schools for Excellent Results

Provide a financial bonus reward of 10% of a school's annual budget, to each school whose students make significantly more academic progress toward a standard of College and Career Readiness Without Need for Remediation at High School Graduation. A school's teachers and principal together as a team would decide how to spend this bonus. Under NCLB there are penalties but not rewards for schools depending upon student achievement results.

4. Hold Schools Accountable for Student Achievement

Any school or local school district would have three years to succeed in having 90% or more of all major student subgroups "on track" to graduate from high school ready for college without needing remediation. If a school or local school district does not reach this level of success after three years, it would be taken over and all contracts with school and district staff ended.

5. Measure Student Performance Using High-Quality Course-Based Exams

Instead of the present NCLB system of accountability, high quality curriculum and exams are needed to measure student innovation, creativity and rigor. Current tests that are multiple choice items and scored by computer, don't do this.

6. Give Parents a Wide Choice of Public Schools

Gather and provide access to diverse information about students and schools, to parents, students, and teachers. Give parents a wide choice of public schools for their children.

7. Provide Federal Help for High-Quality Technical Assistance and Training To Struggling Schools Where Students Are Not Succeeding

Many struggling schools, where students are not on a pathway to success, don't know how to turn things around. Their States lack the capacity to assist them to improve substantially, so the federal government should help.

8. Limit State Per-Pupil Expenditure By School To No More Variation Than 5%, With Two Exceptions

Across the United States, students who have the greatest needs, often attend schools with the least financial resources. Therefore, variation in State Per-Pupil Expenditure by school, should be no more than 5%. Exceptions should be allowed for the higher costs of educating students with disabilities, and students who are "disadvantaged," since costs are more to ensure that these groups meet education standards.

9. Reduce Effects of Poverty on Student Learning by Improving Availability and Coordination of Social Services for Low-Income Children and Families

There is an acknowledgement that a State cannot end poverty for a child, but can help to reduce the effects of poverty on student learning. States can do this by improving the availability and coordination of social services for low-income students and their families. According to leaders of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, the United States has "the most unequal distribution of income of any industrialized nation" in the world. To educate students to world-class standards in schools in any State, means ameliorating and addressing student problems that are related to poverty.

10. Provide High-Quality Early Childhood Education

All U.S. four-year old children, plus all three-year olds from low-income families, should be able to participate in high-quality early childhood education programs. Vocabularies of kindergarteners from low-income families, have only 50% of the vocabularies that kindergarteners from middle to high income families have, in their repertoires. They continue to fall further behind their peers in school, as the years pass, until many dropout of school at whatever is the legal age to do so in their State.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS RELEASES “THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION 2009” REPORT

The National Center for Education Statistics has released its annual report for 2009, entitled “**The Condition of Education.**” These reports provide recent data and trends for diverse aspects of education in the U.S., including teaching and learning statistics for young children, elementary, secondary and postsecondary education.

Since 1870, the federal government has collected data about schools, students, teachers and education funding. Congress requires the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), to publish a yearly statistical report about education in the U.S. In this year’s report, 46 indicators are divided into sections for:

- Participation In Education
- Learning Outcomes
- Student Effort and Educational Progress
- Contexts of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Contexts of Postsecondary Education

Education Enrollment and Diversity

The elementary and secondary education systems in the United States according to the NCES report, are expected to continue enrollment growth every year through 2018, to “an all-time high” of 54 million students. With respect to regional enrollment growth, the South is expected to see the highest, enrollment increases. Enrollment in postsecondary undergraduate and graduate institutions also is expected to rise through 2018. There are no enrollment projections for education after 2018.

As U.S. enrollments grow, so does student diversity. From 1972 to 2007, the portion of public school students who were White dropped from 78% to 56%, while the portion from other ethnicities and racial groups rose from 32% to 44 percent. Hispanic students grew from 6% to 21% of students during that period of time.

The percentage of school-age children whose home language is other than English, and who speak English with difficulty, went up from 3% to 5%, during the period of 1979 to 2000. But between 2000 and 2007, there was no measurable change. A larger proportion of Black and Hispanic students than White students drop out of school and fail to enter college right after high school graduation.

Changes in the composition of college students and graduates has occurred based upon population shifts, but from 1996-1997 to 2006-2007, Hispanic students who earned bachelor’s degrees grew by 84%. The number of Black and Hispanic students who received Master’s degrees “more than doubled” during that period.

U.S. Students' Reading and Math Scores

NCES reports that scores of U.S. 9 year-olds and 13 year-olds, long-term, on reading and math national assessments, have increased since the early 1970's for White, Black and Hispanic students. For 17 year-old students, from 1971 to 2008, overall average scores "remained flat," though for White, Black and Hispanic 17 year-olds there were some increases. The proportion of White students (with higher average test scores traditionally) dropped, in relation to the percentage of students from other racial and ethnic groups.

Since early in the 1990's, U.S. 12th graders' reading scores have fallen, while 4th and 8th graders' scores on reading and math tests rose. Achievement gaps were noted among diverse racial and ethnic groups, especially among older students in higher grades. U.S. 4th and 8th grade students "scored above the international average in science and math in 2007," and have improved on math tests since 1995. Science performance has remained relatively flat since 1995. The "status dropout rate" declined for students in all racial/ethnic groups while attainment of postsecondary degrees improved for Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native students.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan commented on "The Condition of Education 2009" report as follows:

"These findings clearly show the need for us to make college available to all young people and adults and the bottom line benefits of a higher education."

"Over the last three decades, immediate college enrollment increased for all income levels, although we still need to help close the gap between those who need financial help and those who don't."

"The enrollment gap between students from low- and high-income families shrunk by nearly 50 percent, which means more low-income students are accessing college. This is extremely encouraging, as they have the potential to lift families out of poverty. The financial advantages provided by a college education are clear."

"President Obama has set a goal that by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. This requires more college enrollment right out of high school and more adults going back to college as our workforce reinvents itself."

"Stimulus funds and our proposed 2010 budget are targeted to do just that by increasing access to college and reducing high school and college drop out rates."

To access "The Condition of Education, 2009" report please visit:

<http://nces.ed.go/programs/coe/>