



Changing the Story: Transformation toward Fair Accountability and Responsibility in Public Education

A COLLABORATIVE REPORT FROM THE MEMBERS OF THE VIVA NEA 360
ACCOUNTABILITY IDEA EXCHANGE

Prepared for: NEA Accountability Task Force

Prepared by: Members of the VIVA NEA 360 Accountability Writing Collaborative on behalf of their peers in the Idea Exchange

Delivered: Monday, December 8, 2014

Abstract & Summation: Educators from 49 states spent hundreds of hours exchanging ideas about 360 degree accountability systems and how they analyze the interplay of instructional leadership, teaching and student achievement. A small group of participants then distilled the insights of their peers into a set of recommendations for transforming the current American public education accountability system into one that effectively captures the many facets of teaching and learning.

Partner: National Education Association



Introduction



The VIVA (Voices Ideas Vision Action) NEA 360 Accountability Idea Exchange invited educators from across the country to share their ideas about full circle student accountability, educator support, responsibility, and resources. This VIVA Idea Exchange™ is a component of the work initiated by New Business Item B (NBI-B), “Redefining Public School

Accountability”, adopted during the 2014 NEA Annual Meeting and Representative Assembly (RA). One component of NBI-B involved engaging stakeholders across the education community in the necessary deliberations to establish accountability and support systems for our public schools. The online VIVA Idea Exchange™, which combines technology and collaboration to amplify the voices of key stakeholders in critical policy matters, is operated by New Voice Strategies and facilitated by a professional moderator, ensuring the conversation is safe, productive and easily accessible to peers seeking an avenue for joint problem-solving and action.

The VIVA NEA 360 Accountability Idea Exchange was open from September 29, 2014 through December 8, 2014.

The VIVA NEA 360 Accountability Idea Exchange was conducted in three phases:

During Phase I, NEA members from across the country were invited to share their ideas in answer to these questions:

“A wide body of research suggests that instructional quality has an important impact on student learning and development, but is not the only major factor. Are we including appropriate measures and indicators in today’s student accountability systems? How should responsibility for students’ education be assigned and measured at all levels of the education system? How should teachers be supported to provide the best possible education in every classroom? Who should be responsible for providing the resources to create a safe and equitable learning environment for all students?”

In response, 953 members added 306 ideas and shared 971 comments with one another.

During Phase II, 17 educators identified as thoughtful leaders by a proprietary algorithm, were invited to join the VIVA NEA 360 Accountability Writing Collaborative. Their assignment: Take the ideas presented during Phase I and summarize and synthesize them into discrete, workable recommendations for developing a collective education accountability system.

Phase III of the process will begin on December 8, 2014 when the members of the Writing Collaborative present their ideas to NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia, NEA Secretary-Treasurer Princess Moss, and NEA senior staff.

New Voice Strategies believes in the inspiration that grows from pragmatic experience and in the power of individual voices to make big change. The VIVA Idea Exchange™ is one example of that power in action. We are inspired by the teachers and grateful for their positive contribution to strengthen our schools and America’s democratic process. Many thanks to these VIVA NEA 360 Accountability Writing Collaborative teachers: **Jamyle Acevedo, Renee Carlson, Janet Foster, Rebecca Gillespie, Enid Hutchinson, Lori Johnson, Edward Kitlowski, Amanda Koonlaba, Nancy Kunsman, Justin McGehee, Lynn Otaguro, Joy Peters, Wendi Pillars, Rachel Rich, Petra Schmid-Riggins, Jim Strickland, and Josh Thompson**, whose profiles can be found at the end of this report. The innumerable hours these teachers spent grappling with big ideas and small details made this work possible.

We also wish to thank the **National Education Association**, our partner in this endeavor.

Overview



“It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity...is a right which must be available to all on equal terms.”

Chief Justice Earl Warren, Brown v. Bd. Of Ed.

“With the rise of schooling, people began to think of learning as children’s work. The same power-assertive methods that had been used to make children work in fields and factories were quite naturally transferred to the classroom.”

“If we want to understand why standard schools are what they are, we have to abandon the idea that they are products of logical necessity or scientific insight. They are, instead, products of history. Schooling, as it exists today, only makes sense if we view it from a historical perspective.”

Peter Gray Ph.D., Professor at Boston College

Accountability: The obligation to bear the consequences for the failure to perform.

Webster’s Dictionary

“Accountability is something that is left when responsibility has been subtracted.”

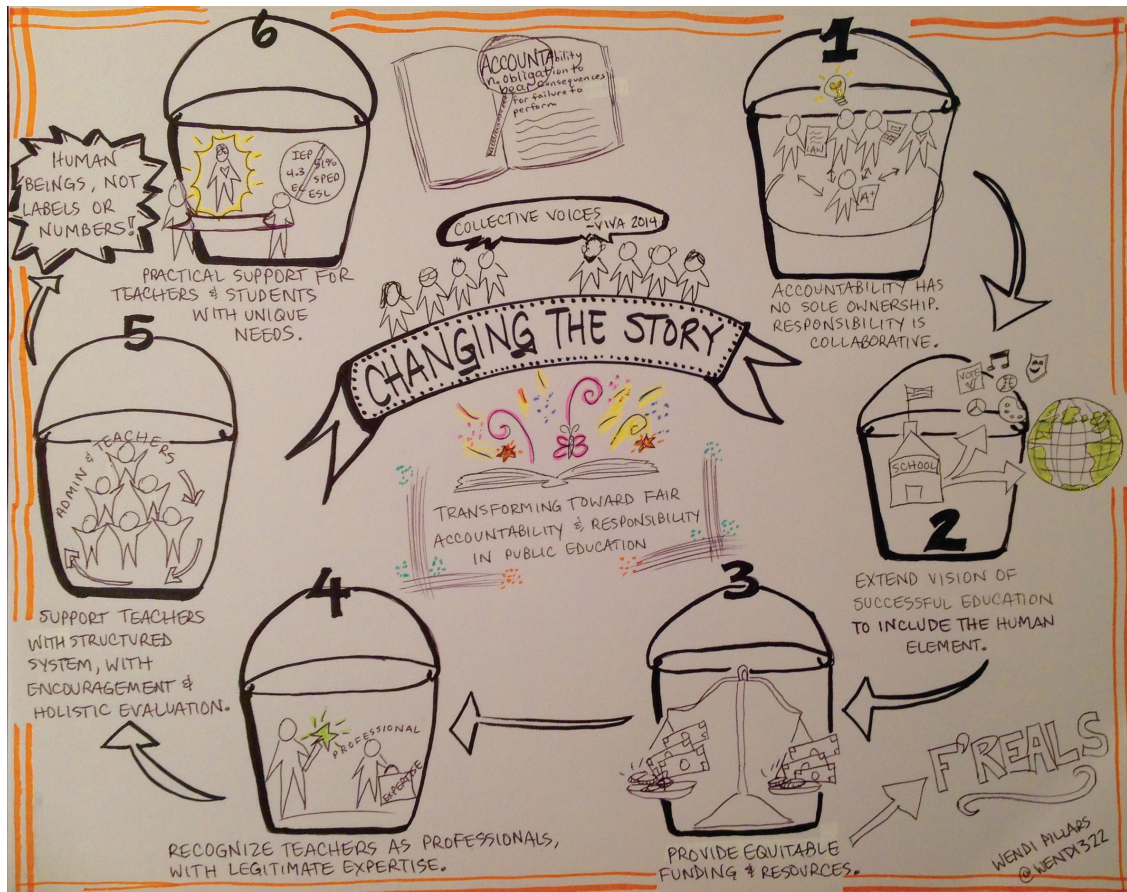
**Pasi Sahlberg, director of Finland’s Ministry of Education’s
Center for International Mobility**

This report is the collective effort of authentic experts. Several hundred educators voiced their hopes, concerns, ideas and frustrations regarding the question of accountability in education. The writers of this report studied the thousands of responses and from them created this body of recommendations. These recommendations are the result of hundreds of collective years of teaching experience from a wide range of educational perspectives.

The Writing Collective envisions an educational system geared toward servicing the whole child, shifting the paradigm away from the data driven, businesslike model that has become increasingly prominent in this era of high stakes testing. Yes, students need to learn and be able to demonstrate learning, but authentic education is not something that can be quantified. Our focus must expand beyond the finite goal of funneling students into colleges. We want to impart on them an infinite love of learning that will sustain throughout their lifetimes, one they can pass on to their own children and students someday. Our recommendations would re-establish an environment of trust and responsibility and empower students to own their educational progress with support from parents, teachers, school districts and local, state and federal authorities. One overwhelming recommendation is to empower the hands-on experts—teachers—to have a voice in educational decisions both in and out of the classroom.

THE VIVA NEA 360 ACCOUNTABILITY IDEA EXCHANGE

Changing the Story



Drawing by Wendi Pillars, 360° Writing Collaborative member, North Carolina

Transforming from narrow accountability to shared responsibility will require policies which support classroom professionalism, clear and broad definitions of success, cooperation and collaboration within communities, and dedicated resources for professional and student growth.

Index of Actionable Ideas

RECOMMENDATION 1

Implement multi-pronged solutions to the multiple factors that impact student learning, enabling legislators, educators, parents, and students to each clearly understand their particular role and responsibility in every student's learning process.

Proposed Solutions

1. Acknowledge (explicitly) that “grades” send multiple messages and fulfill multiple purposes, not one.
2. Create structured events that develop a collaborative outlook amongst teachers, parents, and students.
3. Develop simple home-to-school communication plans using whatever methods are locally accessible or popular.
4. Recognize the neurological impact of socioeconomic factors on student learning and the obstacles this creates both for students and their teachers.
5. Provide quality after-school programs that enrich students socially, behaviorally, and academically while also assuring safety from negative and unsafe behavior.
6. Initiate programs in schools for parent support.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Widen curriculum to promote all areas of human growth such as curiosity, creativity, collaboration and other life-long skills.

Proposed Solutions

7. Broaden curriculum to include essential areas of human growth such as citizenship and community involvement.
8. Build on each student's unique aptitudes through a wide variety of electives and extra-curricular options.
9. Strengthen the relationship between local stakeholders and listen to their voices.
10. Create safe and accepting schools.
11. Democratize school and classroom practices by actively involving students in the processes of planning, decision-making, and problem solving.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Create equity of educational opportunity for all students through appropriate funding, geographical representation in developing standards (and their accompanying assessments), and raising the pedagogical qualifications of teachers.

Proposed Solutions

12. Equalize educational opportunity by recognizing educational opportunity through equitable school funding as a guaranteed civil right.
13. Equalize school funding at the state level utilizing legislation and litigation demanding equal protection for all children under the 14th Amendment.

14. Enlist professional educators from each state involved whenever standards, benchmarks, or assessments are being created, replaced, or revised as part of a multiple state effort.
15. Supplement inequitable education funding to districts by states, with equitable federal dollars.
16. Create incentives for universities to raise the entry qualifications of applicants into education programs and work to elevate the status of teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Empower educators to be decision makers in matters related to curriculum, professional development, and school/district policy.

Proposed Solutions

17. Determine best practices for the classroom with teachers central to the curriculum planning process.
18. Protect and increase instructional planning time in the same manner as mandated instructional time.
19. Allot time for appropriate professional development and collaboration, separate from instructional planning time.
20. Include teachers as leaders in decision-making processes with regard to all aspects of teaching, not only directly within their classroom, but also in broader contexts that ultimately affect students and classrooms.
21. Compensate teachers on the same level as other professionals with similar training and responsibilities, and offer incentives for those willing to work in schools/districts impacted by factors that make learning more challenging.
22. Treat teachers professionally during the evaluation process, whether one is meeting the highest standards or is recommended for improvement.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Create a new restructured evaluation system of collaboration where teachers have equal voice of their annual professional growth.

Proposed Solutions

23. Restructure the evaluation process to a supportive collaboration where teachers and administrators have equal weighted voice on teacher performance and evaluations.
24. Exclude standardized testing from playing any role in a teacher's evaluation, compensation, or retention.
25. Require administrators to teach a class in order to stay in touch with current classroom issues, especially the classroom impact of education policy.
26. Restructure summative evaluations to include a teacher generated final report as documentation of teacher success, and furnish a clear response/recourse for teachers who disagree with/challenge administrator ratings.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Honor the commitment for all students to receive Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), recognizing that the diversity of student needs requires diverse programs to accomplish this goal.

Proposed Solutions

27. Provide supportive professional development for all teachers and administrators to help meet the varied needs of students.
28. Extend the ELL testing exemption nationwide.
29. Foster consistency among states regarding testing practices, ELP standards, and ELP levels.
30. Limit the number of high stakes testing for SPED and ELL students including local and state testing.
31. Mandate that all testing organizations, be it for voluntary exams such as the SAT or for any mandated assessments, create assessments incorporating IEP modifications/accommodations.
32. Limit the number of SPED and/or ESOL students per class depending on student proficiency/ability level.
33. Include more paraprofessional and teacher support in general education classes.
34. Incorporate vocational programs back into secondary schools nationwide.
35. Create more open enrollment school districts with varied choice of curricular offerings.
36. Focus on growth measurement as determined by legally-bound IEP goals, rather than standardized tests, honoring the IEP as the most relevant measurement of student progress.
37. Eliminate Alternative Assessments that measure watered down versions of grade level standards.
38. Develop assessments that use a student's individual test results as a way to show their own personal growth rather than comparing all students against each other.



RECOMMENDATION 1

Implement multi-pronged solutions to the multiple factors that impact student learning, enabling legislators, educators, parents, and students to each clearly understand their particular role and responsibility in every student's learning process.

Statement of the Problem

The credit (or blame) behind the quality of student learning is often ascribed entirely to the teacher, or the student, or the parent(s), or to larger social factors like poverty. When a student fails to meet prescribed standards we are tempted to point the finger in one place. We want to be able to say whose fault it is. But when the causes are many—as they often are—we need to instead ask what can be done about each contributing factor.

Students can become discouraged and lose interest in learning when choices or circumstances are not met with guidance, consequences, and/or support. Administrators, policymakers, teachers and parents too often blame each other for a student's struggles rather than working together to help the student develop more positive habits and values.

How does stress affect kids from lower SES compared to those of middle or upper income?

- Poor families move twice as often and get evicted five times as frequently (Federman et al., 1996).
- Children of poverty take 50 percent more street crossings with a six times greater risk in pedestrian accidents (McPherson et al., 1998).
- Poor children have more contact with aggressive peers (Sinclair et al., 1994).
- Academic performance can be negatively affected when students experience community violence. This may include an unsafe home, neighborhood, or a dangerous path to school (Schwartz & Gorman, 2003).
- Greater safety concerns lead to academic underperformance (Pratt et al., 1997).
- Significantly more daily stresses—up to 35 percent more daily hassles – takes a toll on the body (Attar et al., 1994).
- Unhealthy food choices—which could be due to appetite, eating habits, or affordability—lead to chronically higher levels of cortisol (Cartwright, et al., 2003).

Humans respond to chronic stress in one of two ways: (1) we become angry and aggressive; or (2) we become passive, even helpless (Johnston-Brooks, et al., 1998). Understanding these reactions can help educators experience kids from poverty as being victims of these problems, not simply perpetrators of them (Sapolsky, 2005).

Proposed Solutions

1. Acknowledge (explicitly) that “grades” send multiple messages and fulfill multiple purposes, not one.

People often get caught up in wanting “good grades” but miss the actual message grades are intended to communicate. Students and parents may become more interested in extra-curricular activities (making academics less of a priority), or a required curriculum may fail to engage. Poverty can cause measurable neurological effects that teachers may not know how to identify or address however students cannot manually “switch off” these influences in the classroom.





Students with reduced impulse control, inattention to directions, reduced task completion and inappropriate social interactions may come across as being “bad kids”, forcing teachers to choose between rewarding bad behaviors with a good grade and blaming a student with a bad one.

District leadership, administrators, and teacher policies must reflect on the varied purposes of student grades. There should not be an assumption that one factor solely dictates any grade. These reflections should occur at the local levels. Examples include:

- Grades are not **only** a raw measurement of knowledge;
- Grades are not **only** a merit badge or a statement of “best-effort good character”;
- Grades do not **only** mean the student can please an authority figure;
- Grades do not **only** indicate a student’s learning status in comparison to other students.

2. Create structured events that develop a collaborative outlook amongst teachers, parents, and students.

While these events would be determined at local levels based on student and community needs, some examples might include:

1. Replacing traditional Parent-Teacher conferences with student-led conferences that encourage students to reflect on their learning strengths and needs.
2. Developing a contract outlining expectations for student, teacher, and parent roles in the learning process.
3. Providing parents and teachers with training for how to engage in crucial conversations about student learning without fear of scapegoating or blame.

3. Develop simple home-to-school communication plans using whatever methods are locally accessible or popular.

These should reduce the excessive time-burden that constant home communication puts on teachers while enabling parents to stay connected to the classroom and student expectations. Examples may include texting, telephone calls, e-mail, school-website access, or notes.

4. Recognize the neurological impact of socioeconomic factors on student learning and the obstacles this creates both for students and their teachers.

Rather than simply treating entire schools as qualifying or not, sensitively support students affected by poverty conditions, determine whether supplementary services are needed, and provide scientifically validated instruction to remediate or compensate for poverty’s neurological effects. This should include providing professional development for teachers on the use of specific social and instructional strategies to enable smoother interaction with students dealing with emotional problems or SES-related differences in thought processes.

5. Provide quality after-school programs that enrich students socially, behaviorally, and academically while also assuring safety from negative and unsafe behavior.



According to Arizona Center for Afterschool Excellence (2014), 80% of a young person's waking hours are spent outside the classroom, yet 20% (11.3 million) of youth are left unsupervised after school.

In many instances after-school programs are unavailable or unaffordable. Building quality after-school programs creates a system of proactive support and provides opportunities for youth to develop positive relationships with adults, especially critical for students coming from homes with busy or absent parents. After-school programs may also offer behavioral and health services for additional support.

6. Initiate programs in schools for parent support.

Provide assistance for locally developed support programs for parents based on the community strengths, interests, and needs. These programs could be linked to the health care system.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

When adults fail to meet obligations in the “real world” there can be large consequences. Letting students learn these lessons at a younger age in a safe environment reduces their risk of having to learn the hard way when they’re older. Students who are raised in a discouraging home environment, with absent or busy parents, financial struggles, or other debilitating life factors are at a disadvantage to internalize and learn from life’s lessons. Any program that compensates for these learning barriers helps allow students to absorb these lessons rather than reject them.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Teachers

Much is required of teachers, but some circumstances are not always under a teacher’s control. Deliberately spreading out and clarifying responsibility for students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders allows teachers to focus more on teaching and students more on learning.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Parents

Parents are as much a result of the conditions that challenge students as their children. Providing support and supplementary care for families aids parents’ personal efforts and reduces stress that may eventually trickle down to students’ performance in school. Parents will view the school as a partner, not an adversary, and vice-versa.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Widen curriculum to promote all areas of human growth such as curiosity, creativity, collaboration and other life-long skills.

In order to educate the whole child, we need to support student growth through individualized guidance programs, electives that nurture aptitudes and extra-curricular activities that develop social skills. This can only happen in a safe and democratic environment. See Appendix for examples of holistic standards.

Statement of the Problem

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that, *“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”* For the past several decades the focus of education has become increasingly narrow and subject to centralized control from outside the classroom. For many students this has resulted in an impersonal, fragmented educational experience that feels disconnected from their real life experiences and values.

Our students need to grow into whole adults who know who they are, what values guide their lives, and what they have to contribute to their communities. They need to develop resilience, character, integrity, social competence, and responsible self-direction. Current subject-centered practices are creating adults who lack confidence in their own judgment and abilities and whose greatest gifts and talents remain uncultivated.

In 1952, educator and author Earl Kelley wrote that “What we need is not a lowering or a weakening of standards, but a new set of standards to uphold. These new standards would not be oriented to subject matter at all, but rather to human growth... We might call them human standards, and hold them high.” It’s time to turn our attention to these human standards and the promise they hold for education today.

Proposed Solutions

7. Broaden curriculum to include essential areas of human growth such as citizenship and community involvement.

The goal of education should be to develop whole human beings who are capable, connected and contributing members of a society. Excessive emphasis on standardized tests diverts attention from the common human standards that make this broader focus possible. Schools and school districts need the freedom to work in collaboration with students, parents, and community members to define the human standards that are most important for students as unique individuals, active community members, and effective citizens in our democratic society. These standards can then guide curriculum development and the process of setting instructional priorities. This will necessitate more subjective assessment in these areas but we cannot allow this challenge to divert us from the central human purposes of public education.

One way to make this work is for each student to have their own “growth advisory team”, which consists of the student, teacher, parents, school counselors, and selected community members. This team would follow the student throughout their educational experience and eventually determine when the student is ready to graduate and take their place in the adult world.



Another idea is a personalized advisory program, where advisors stay with the same group of students over several years. Unfortunately, advisory programs can often become focused on managerial tasks and academic record keeping. Advisories can only serve the purpose of human growth when it is student-centered and relationship-based (Littky, 2004).

A broader curriculum can address ethics and manners. Students are exposed daily to bullying, harassment, disrespect, stereotyping and cheating. It is pertinent to teach (and model) how to stand up for oneself, as well as develop self-esteem, tolerance for others, honesty and courtesy. A field trip sponsored by a content course can become the perfect vehicle for practicing these skills. Student advisory classes are also great opportunities to reinforce ethics and courtesy through modeling and positive comments.

Excellent work is also being done on the value of incorporating social and emotional learning (SEL) into the general curriculum. SEL is an approach to learning in which children develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations constructively. For children to succeed in developing these life skills, SEL must be taught in the context of safe and supportive school, family, and community learning environments (Goleman and Senge, 2014).

According to psychoanalyst Lev Vygotsky, even social interactions by themselves contribute to the ongoing development of higher functions. In *Making the Case for Educating the Whole Child*, the ASCD reiterates this view, *“Students engaged in school-based social and emotional learning attained higher grades and scores 11 percentile points higher on academic achievement tests than peers who did not engage in such learning.”*

8. Build on each student's unique aptitudes through a wide variety of electives and extra-curricular options.

Each student brings to the table their unique strengths and experiences. To ignore this by channeling disproportionate funds and time into Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and lengthy standardized tests results in a catastrophic waste of money and human potential.

According to a Wisconsin study, costs for mandated testing average \$33.91 per student. School districts are also faced with hidden costs like dramatically increased “preparation, test administration, and loss of services and instructional time” (Zellmer, Frontier, & Pfeifer, 2006). Districts also swallow the price of more computers, modern operating systems and higher bandwidth. The Central Florida School Board Coalition estimates the annual cost of their state's mandated tests at \$59,000,000 for fees alone, not including scoring, help-desks, or reporting. Matthew Chingos of the Brookings Institute chides the industry for this lack of transparent pricing, estimating that annual tests soared to \$1.7 billion nation-wide in 2012. As more states comply, the costs to our schools soar even higher.

Since the inception of NCLB and Race to the Top, a survey by the Center on Education Policy reports most of the nation's 15,000 school districts have drastically reduced electives in order to focus time and money on standardized tests. The Arts Education Policy Review (AEPR) notes it has become commonplace to withdraw students from electives for failing the state test. *“The elective course is replaced with a remedial math or reading class that is intended to help raise scores.”* But this is counterproductive since without electives, a student *“may lose his or her only outlet for creative expression, and may therefore lose interest in school altogether.”*

The standardized tests focus narrowly on two skills—English and math. Still, the AEPR asks, *“How does this (narrow) curriculum prepare students for a college education that encompasses humanities, social sciences and arts? Is our goal simply to get students **to** college, or to help them **succeed** in and graduate from college?”* Harvard researcher Howard Gardner insists that besides language and mathematics, visual, physical, musical, emotional, social, outdoor and moral skills are equally important for interacting with the world. **It is imperative that the federal government, states, and districts reinvest in a full spectrum of courses and extra-curricular options that inspire and train students not only for college, but also for a lifetime.**

Electives develop skills that become life-long vocations and avocations. Students who enjoy playing tennis in PE likely will not turn professional, but may continue to play for pleasure and good health the rest of their lives, thus reducing the risk of obesity and diabetes. Student health is just as worthy a goal as literacy. The same can be said for all electives. Foreign languages and exchange programs often create world travelers and international understanding. Music, art and dance become healthy outlets for stress. Drama classes improve confidence and self-expression. Metal and woodshop teach practical skills, while drafting teaches precision and analytical skills. Culinary arts produce not only chefs but also good home cooks. Only the students themselves, their families and advisors will know which courses best develop their potential.

9. Strengthen the relationship between local stakeholders and listen to their voices.

Teachers, parents, and community members know what our young people need in order to take their place as whole persons and contributing adults within our communities. Each stakeholder must have a voice, a role, and a responsibility in creating the kind of education vital to our children’s growth. Current practices far too often treat education as the separate domain of outside “experts” with little or no stakeholder involvement.

Schools and school districts must develop sustainable mechanisms for engaging families and the larger community in ongoing dialogue around educational issues. This can take the form of regular community forums, advisory groups, online surveys and discussion groups, and various face-to-face partnerships at the classroom and school levels.

Whatever the mechanisms used, students must experience school as an integral part of the larger world around them. They need to leave school with a strong network of connections already established and a real sense that there is a valued place for them in the larger community.

10. Create safe and accepting schools.

Fear is incompatible with learning. A lack of physical safety breeds a host of psychological and social problems for students and their schools. According to the ASCD, *“Victims of crime or violence at school are likely to experience loneliness, depression, and adjustment difficulties, and they are more prone to truancy, poor academic performance, dropping out of school, and violent behaviors.”*

Feeling like a failure is another roadblock to learning. When students’ strengths lie outside core academics, their skills go unnoticed and their weaknesses become magnified. They begin to feel like they don’t belong. Schools must convey to students that they are accepted and valued just the way they are, regardless of academic achievements.

Education is about individual growth. Self-assessments and portfolios are ways to express and measure that growth, because not all valuable skills show on report cards. According to Arne Duncan, Assistant Secretary to the US Department of Education, student strengths are developed through clubs, honor societies, camps, language immersions, athletics and family to school events. *“Extracurricular activities continue to build students’ academic and social skills outside of class... increasing physical fitness and building skills in disciplines like music, technology, and debate.”* In a letter from his USDE Office for Civil Rights, dated just this October 1, 2014, **Duncan further declares that all schools, regardless of social background, are responsible for offering this wide range of non-academic activities. The Department of Education must lobby for adequate school funding dedicated to electives and extra-curricular programs.**

11. Democratize school and classroom practices by actively involving students in the processes of planning, decision making, and problem solving.

Education is widely accepted as the foundation of our democracy, seeking to balance individual needs and desires with those of the group. Since students learn from their experiences, democratic values must be reflected in our schools and classrooms. Current practices routinely deny students and stakeholders a voice in the name of imposed, predetermined, standardized goals. Authoritarian schools emphasize conformity and compliance, teaching students to be passive recipients of others’ agendas, the antithesis of democracy.

In his essay, *Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us*, John Dewey wrote, *“Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained.”* **How** we do things in our schools is more important than **what** we do. Democracy in action can take the form of regular class meetings, peer mediation, student court, a participatory student government, and community based service-learning projects.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students.

Students’ motivation increases when they feel valued, and this in turn accelerates learning. When learning becomes not merely a task but something meaningful, students become easy to engage. In an era of increasing economic specialization and emphasis on the role of schools in preparing students for effective participation in a global economy, we cannot lose sight of the reality that basic human nature and human needs haven’t changed. Students still need to experience safety, belonging, friendship, acceptance, and purpose. They still need to have some say in the decisions that affect their lives, to experience self-direction in their work, and to exercise their creativity. And they still need to live life at a human pace with relevant, human-scale expectations, to know their unique talents and how to use them, and to be part of something larger than themselves.

All too often schools attempt to use short-term extrinsic motivation, while a democratic approach sparks life-long *intrinsic motivation*. We want students who are academically competent, but we also want students who are happy, who are caring, who have personal integrity, and who take their place in the world with dignity and vision. Whole children grow into whole adults who can live whole lives. Educating the whole child is the place to start.

An example of an approach using more holistic, human standards is Lynn Stoddard's *Educating for Human Greatness*, in which he identifies these seven powers of human greatness:

1. **Identity**—the power of self-worth that comes from knowing who you are and what you have to contribute to society; the development of diverse talents and gifts.
2. **Inquiry**—the power of curiosity and the ability to ask good questions.
3. **Interaction**—the power of love, friendship, respectful communication, and cooperation.
4. **Initiative**—the power of will, self-direction, and discipline.
5. **Imagination**—the power of creativity.
6. **Intuition**—the power to sense truth with the heart; emotional intelligence.
7. **Integrity**—the power of honesty, character, and responsibility.

Another example comes from Marysville Pilchuck High School in Marysville, Washington, which incorporates the “10 C’s” of growth:

1. **Competence**—the skills needed to maximize independence, quality of life, and community participation.
2. **Character**—personal traits such as honesty, courage, kindness, and integrity.
3. **Communication**—the ability to understand and to make oneself understood by others.
4. **Critical thinking**—the ability to ask questions, make decisions, and solve problems.
5. **Collaboration**—the ability to work well with others towards a common goal.
6. **Creativity**—the ability to think for oneself and generate new ideas, actions, and products.
7. **Curiosity**—the desire to explore, discover, and understand.
8. **Connection**—meaningful relationships with other people, places, and organizations.
9. **Caring**—thoughtful respect for the well-being of others and the world around us.
10. **Citizenship**—effective participation and contribution to the larger community.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Create equity of educational opportunity for all students through appropriate funding, geographical representation in developing standards (and their accompanying assessments), and raising the pedagogical qualifications of teachers.

“What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must be what the community wants for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unloving; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.”

Jonathan Dewey

Statement of the Problem

Conversations about school accountability often ignore extreme inequalities that have undermined American schools for decades. Unequal funding between states and districts results in inequitable class-size, resources, facilities, technology, textbooks, curriculum, and even teacher experience. These radically different worlds make interstate and intrastate comparisons of student achievement illusory at best. National assessment numbers reflect pre-existing demographic or economic inequalities without allowing districts to directly refer to these realities affecting their test scores. These inequalities created by locally determined school funding leave students unequal before the law and create a permanent underclass.

Another source of inequality is that one-fifth of Americans move annually, while some districts report almost half of their students change schools annually. Research shows these moves negatively impact student achievement, especially in grades K–8. Variations between district standards and curriculum spell disaster. Furthermore, school resources can be overwhelmed by sudden demographic changes—an influx of war refugees or immigrants, or shrinking enrollment due to declining mineral or farm prices. In light of such factors outside school control, assessments must be flexible, adaptive, voluntary, and developed by local teachers to meet local needs. Teachers from every state and district must be engaged in creating curriculum and tests, so that these take into account the unique challenges facing each region.

School Funding History

- School funding equity litigation began with the landmark 1954 *Brown vs. The Board of Education*. The case challenged Plessy vs. Ferguson’s “separate but equal” doctrine that allowed segregated schools. It also targeted their unequal funding and resources in schools racially segregated by law (de jure segregation).
- *San Antonio vs. Rodriguez* in 1974 ended the era of education as a federal civil right receiving broad constitutional protection under the 14th Amendment’s “equal protection” clause. *Rodriguez* allows severe educational inequalities to exist and persist by leaving education and its funding up to states. Consequently, it has caused costly and redundant litigation in 44 of 50 states over the last thirty years with less than ideal results.
- Since *Brown* and *Rodriguez*, education funding has remained largely inequitable between states and within states despite legislation and litigation in the various states.

School Funding Today

- States today have significantly less money to fund schools due to property tax freezes starting in the 1970s with its *Taxpayer Revolts*, decreased tax revenues due to outsourcing and resulting state budget crises, and the housing bubble burst/subprime lending crisis that resulted in the Great Recession of 2008.
- Shrinking funding means growing class sizes and chronically low and stagnant teacher salaries at a time when more is expected of schools than ever.
- Schools in both the American South and North are more segregated than they were in 1954. As federal court decisions dealing with segregation by law are gutted, southern schools are re-segregating. White flight spurred by *Brown* in 1954 enabled by the arteries that made suburban flight realistic in the 1956 Federal Highway Act worsened through real estate blockbusting, lender redlining (and contract home buying), and the 1968 Fair Housing Act (which concentrated urban minority populations in impoverished urban inner cities by building housing projects on the cheapest land available). These realities reinforced by *Rodriguez* created two Americas unworthy of the Constitution: one suburban and wealthy with high achieving schools; one urban and poor with poorly achieving schools.
- Impoverished rural areas face many of the same challenges as impoverished urban systems due to the different fiscal schemes and a relative lack of property tax revenue streams to fund education.
- Poor districts and rich districts compete for resources within states and between states. Competition for raw materials does not improve educational quality.
- Decades of neglect of school facilities in many states mean excessive capital construction needs without sufficient funding resources.
- The urban-rural-suburban funding inequity and inequity among districts with greater tax resources than others present serious problems that require immediate remedy before we can begin a conversation that is fair to students about school accountability or fair assessment.
- These realities dictate that one third of new teachers leave the profession after three years and 40-50 percent after five years, with about 13% of teachers leaving the profession annually.

These inequalities have created opportunities for corporate interests to provide ill-fated solutions oblivious to input from teachers facing those challenges. Some decry the failure of public education and advocate for school privatization in seizing a \$10 trillion profit opportunity. These corporate reform efforts have destroyed public trust in our tradition of American public education. Notables including the DeVos family, David and Charles Koch, and Bill Gates fund education reform efforts from the controversial Common Core State Standards to promoting corporate for-profit charters with proven poor results. Corporate interference in schools compromises their democratic function and threatens academic freedom in the interest of profits.

Proposed Solutions

12. Equalize educational opportunity by recognizing educational opportunity through equitable school funding as a guaranteed civil right.

Redundant and frequently unsuccessful attempts to pass legislation, or to litigate at the state level in order to create equity, have only further guaranteed inequitable school funding throughout the states and within them. School funding will only improve when educational opportunity through equitable school funding becomes an undisputed federal civil right. Maintaining state or local control over education standards and curriculum to best represent community values, needs, and interests has obvious advantages yet local control has simultaneously disadvantaged a mobile and fluid student population and compromised academic freedom. Where the need to respect



local and state prerogatives pertaining to education must be acknowledged, so too must the need to provide a common framework of educational standards due to the increased mobility of the American population and the need to equally and adequately fund schools nationwide. Without either a different decision from the high court overturning *Rodriguez* or a constitutional amendment, inequality is a constitutionally and court-mandated reality. They require the battle over equitable school funding legislation or litigation be fought state by state, which is costly and redundant.

Many fear that a Constitutional amendment clarifying educational opportunity as a federal civil right may lead to increased federal control. That isn't necessarily so. Such an amendment can reaffirm and guarantee education as the primary domain of state and local governments at the same time that it would equalize resources. By so doing, it wouldn't sacrifice state and local control over content and assessment, but would equalize education funding within every state and between every state gradually over time, especially when state or local governments fail to provide equitable educational opportunity. It would simply provide the legal necessity and urgency to state and local governments to adequately and equitably fund all of its schools, and provide a mechanism whereby students would not long be disadvantaged by schools that failed to do so.

Under such an amendment, multi-state education standards and assessments could be made more uniform with greater emphasis on input from professional educators from every involved state, whether that be in revisions to Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards or in some other visage. Yet, the strict interpretation echoed in *Rodriguez* could still be honored by guaranteeing flexibility, voluntary association of states for multi-state standards, and state and local control over all other decisions. Together, we can improve the Constitution for the 21st Century by addressing a reality its framers couldn't imagine in 1787 in a manner completely in line with its most important ideas, especially the equality of people before the law and shared power.

Appendix

Education as a civil right and teacher tenure/due process rights. In June 2014, the Superior Court of the State of California decided in *Vergara vs. California* that the state's teacher tenure system protected "grossly ineffective" teachers. Teacher tenure was therefore an equal protection violation of low income and minority students to equal educational opportunity and quality under the California State Constitution and current California case law. As we seek to make educational opportunity an undisputed federal civil right, it is critical to understand the history of teacher tenure systems in insulating teachers from politics and protecting both good teachers and academic freedom. Any Constitutional action needs to recognize that making education an indisputable federal civil right should not compromise the teacher quality that teacher tenure and due process rights afford. The myth that they mostly protect "grossly ineffective" teachers needs to be exposed. Future constitutional action should not become the basis under an *equal protection of law* argument to destroy due process rights of teachers or teacher tenure. In fact, it should instead bolster them.



13. Equalize school funding at the state level utilizing legislation and litigation demanding equal protection for all children under the 14th Amendment.

It's been 60 years since Thurgood Marshall declared that the 14th Amendment guaranteed equal protection for all children in the U.S. with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling. The years immediately following were filled with stall tactics by governors trying to sidestep the law and avoid fulfilling its intent to abolish the separate but equal doctrine. As time passed, the general public became more inclusive and accepting toward all people. Unfortunately, unequal elements remain within the educational system today. Until educational opportunity becomes an undisputed federal civil right, the only path to equity in education is through state legislation and litigation.

14. Enlist professional educators from each state involved whenever standards, benchmarks, or assessments are being created, replaced, or revised as part of a multiple state effort.

Most people enter the teaching profession because they are passionate about learning. They can have a rigorous, standards-based lesson, but if something unforeseen happens, that plan goes out the window. It could be a power outage, a sudden emergency, or maybe several students need to continue work on the lesson from the day before. Better yet, perhaps the students are asking thoughtful, probing questions, and the flexible, savvy teacher—in touch with their students—is going to seize that moment and save that well-planned lesson for another day. This is just one reason why educators need to be an intricate part in the development and revision of state and national standards and assessments. Teachers know that having a plan is good, but the needs of our students drive our instruction, not the other way around.

Many critics of *No Child Left Behind* charge that it only succeeded in lowering educational standards. Multi-state standards involving input from teachers in every school can help raise the bar for every student because they would empower the local teacher who knows their students and their needs and challenges best. Although educators recognize the potential disadvantages of local control and advantages of national standards and benchmarks for a changing and mobile society, there lacks a process that honors the voice of professional educators from every involved state in their revision or improvement. Current education standards in math, language arts, and science adopted by multiple states are in part controversial because teachers from every state weren't involved in creating them. We believe assessment decisions are best handled locally given the diverse populations each school and district serves.

15. Supplement inequitable education funding to districts by states, with equitable federal dollars.

The operational costs of an educational facility are phenomenal. Buildings need continual upkeep, the certified and classified staff—the largest expense—place unending demands on budgets and cannot happen without a large cash flow of public money. The majority of children in the U.S. attend public schools, but not all public schools which children attend are equal. The condition of schools is dependent on the tax dollars generated by the state and federal funding. This federal money should be distributed to the schools with the highest need, not the highest test scores.

16. Create incentives for universities to raise the entry qualifications of applicants into education programs and work to elevate the status of teachers.

Finland has captured the attention of the education world with their students' high scores on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Since its inception, the United States has never scored particularly well on this test. In Finland, teacher candidates must go through a competitive application process where only about 10 percent are accepted. One area where change in U.S. higher education could be implemented would be to raise the entrance qualifications for education majors. Other professions often have tough admission standards that weed out students who may not have the aptitude for that line of work. It seems vital that prospective teachers also possess a certain level of potential before many years and thousands of dollars are spent on training and education. This is not to say that becoming a teacher should become some kind of exclusive club, rather that competition may draw out the individuals with the most passion and aptitude for teaching and put only the most skilled people in the classroom.

Finnish students actually spend less time in the classroom, in test prep, or taking tests than U.S. students. Ironically, as the U.S. looks at Finland with admiration for its stellar test scores; education in the U.S. is being forced to move in a direction that is totally contrary. American educators spend excessive amounts of time preparing for tests, giving tests, and eliminating (or severely curtailing) essential parts of a student's day that have proven to help them be successful (i.e., recess, music, art, and physical education). Considering the current increases of testing requirements in the U.S., the Fins will no doubt continue to outpace the U.S. for the foreseeable future. Additionally, there are no private schools, so all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, attend the same schools.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

If all students attend schools with adequate funding, the opportunity for success will be limitless. Adequate does not mean that students have every new technological gadget or a three course meal at lunch. What it means is that when a child arrives at school, they know that they are safe, they will have teachers and support staff that care about them, and they will receive the type of instruction that is equal to other students in the U.S.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Teachers

Teachers will benefit from adequate and equal funding because those serving in low-income areas will be able to focus on teaching and not whether we might lose our jobs due to budget cuts. Students will also benefit from a school climate that isn't cynical and uncertain, but rather one that celebrates growth and achievement because they have enough teachers, desks, books, and even toilet paper to make them feel like they are important enough to invest in.



Why We Believe This Will Work for Parents

Think of buying car insurance. We buy it because the law says we have to, but also so that in the event of an accident, we have money available to cover the costs of a new car, injuries, or property damage. Over the course of a person's driving career, chances are they will not receive as much in benefits as they pay. That is actually a good thing.

Equity in funding education is similar. Chances are people will not personally benefit from how money is allocated, from a well-supported school to an underfunded one. But those tax dollars are part of the pot that provides funding for any student who needs a public education. In reality, everyone benefits even if they don't personally have children who attend those schools. An educated population serves the mutual benefit of our society. Some families send their children to a private school, but most attend neighborhood schools. Parents who send their child to a school in need and see those needs being addressed will feel significant and valued. Parents who send their child to a private school should view this distribution of funds as a means to improve society as a whole, which benefits the lives of all children, including their own.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Empower educators to be decision makers in matters related to curriculum, professional development, and school/district policy.

Statement of the Problem

“Give us a fair share ...and watch the joy of learning return to the classroom. Give teachers back their autonomy and respect, and watch us work even harder than ever to reach and teach each child.”

Elaine C., 360° Idea Exchange participant

James Harvey, “Getting Beyond the Blame Game”

- More than half of teachers (51 percent) report feeling under great stress several days a week, an increase of 15 percent over the proportion of teachers reporting that level in 1985.
- Teacher satisfaction is on the decline. Five years ago, 62 percent reported themselves to be “very satisfied.” Today, just 39 percent of teachers do so, the lowest level in 25 years.
- Less-satisfied teachers are more likely to work in schools where budgets have declined in the last 12 months.
- Less-satisfied teachers are more likely to work in schools that have experienced decreases in time for professional development and collaboration with other teachers.
- Less-satisfied teachers tend to believe that maintaining an adequate supply of effective teachers (58 percent) and creating and maintaining an academically rigorous learning environment (66 percent) are challenging issues for school leaders.
- Ninety seven percent of teachers give high ratings to other teachers in their schools.

Time magazine’s recent cover depicted America’s teachers as “Bad Apples.” This attitude of finding fault with teachers permeates the national discussion on education. Teachers often find themselves dealing with situations beyond their control then get blamed when results fail to meet standards prescribed by entities outside of education. With an overemphasis on assessment and data-driven instruction, teachers have little opportunity for planning quality lessons, choosing appropriate professional development, collaborating with fellow teachers, or emerging as leaders within the school community. Teachers are frequently excluded from the decision making process with regard to school policy and procedures, use of resources, textbook choices, teacher evaluation, and teacher pay and stipends.

Proposed Solutions

17. Determine best practices for the classroom with teachers central to the curriculum planning process.

According to the Equity and Excellence Commission's report, teachers—together with principals—are the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement. Given their impact on achievement, it is imperative that teachers be treated as professionals who know their students' needs and how to deliver instruction appropriately. Teachers have access to all pertinent data on students and build deep and meaningful relationships with them. They should be key players in curriculum planning with the freedom to choose their materials/textbook/resources and the autonomy to make adjustments on the fly without fear of an administrator or department chair challenging their decision.

Allowing teachers to determine best practices will result in removing scripted, one-size-fits-all lessons that sometimes emerge from district-level decision-making and ignore the human element. Classroom teachers know how to assess, monitor, and adjust, and if allowed to use their professional judgment with students, schools will see student growth.

18. Protect and increase instructional planning time in the same manner as mandated instructional time.

What is instructional planning time?

Teachers need time designated solely for preparing materials and planning methods of instructional delivery. These tasks include but are not limited to: selecting and organizing materials, arranging the classroom to create an environment conducive to learning, and documenting progress and displaying signs of student learning. Such tasks are time consuming, require full physical and mental involvement, and cannot be accomplished while attending meetings.

Students deserve teachers who are prepared for class each day; teachers who are given adequate focused planning time. While most teacher contracts allot for instructional planning, the reality is that often teachers are asked to cover classes, collaborate with colleagues, or attend professional development meetings chosen by an administrator or someone at the district level. These obligations absorb planning time that should be spent preparing for teaching all learners.

19. Allot time for appropriate professional development and collaboration, separate from instructional planning time.

In his book *Outliers* Malcolm Gladwell points to 10,000 hours as the point of mastery of a craft. Veteran teachers have put those hours in many times over, but novice teachers need time to become masters. All teachers require continued development as conditions for student success evolve, but master teachers and novice teachers often have different professional development needs. All teachers are capable of identifying their own professional development needs, and all need time to master new content and incorporate new practices into our classrooms. When master teachers mentor novice teachers, both reap benefits. Master teachers can share experiences of what has or hasn't worked over the years, and novice teachers can share new innovative methods they bring to the classroom.

“The simplest, most effective performance-enhancing tip for any organization is for the people in charge, whether they’re teachers or principals or corporate managers, to have two fewer conversations in a given week about how to do something and two more conversations about why they’re doing it.”

Amy Azzam, *Motivated to Learn: A Conversation with Daniel Pink*

20. Include teachers as leaders in decision-making processes with regard to all aspects of teaching, not only directly within their classroom, but also in broader contexts that ultimately affect students and classrooms.

Teachers are important stakeholders in our educational system, yet when school policies are created teachers are usually left out of the decision-making process. District level administration and school boards, state entities, and even federal organizations make key decisions that impact classrooms. These decisions might involve purchasing curriculum, school mandates, budget concerns, and other matters that have great implications for the teaching and learning within each classroom. When these decisions are made, the opinion of those most impacted by the policies is essential. Teacher input adds value to understanding the impact of policy on students, classrooms, and in schools.

Teacher leadership often begins with the formation of leadership teams or other structures. At times however these structures have proven imperfect when teacher input is heavily scripted and narrowly defined. Opportunities for leadership need to be authentic. Teachers should be valued as problem-solvers and have a voice within every school system. Teachers may not always agree with administrators but should feel free to offer their ideas and concerns openly and honestly, without fear of retaliation. Teachers are in a perfect place to know what improvements can be made to benefit our schools and should be trusted with a role in decision-making that extends beyond the classroom, within every school system.

21. Compensate teachers on the same level as others professionals with similar training and responsibilities, and offer incentives for those willing to work in schools/districts impacted by factors that make learning more challenging.

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) uses the term “teaching penalty” to refer to the income of graduates entering the teaching profession. Their studies, along with The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), show that teachers earn 12% to 14% “less than other similarly educated workers” and “60% of what their peers earn.”

Raising teacher pay will result in more candidates entering the profession. Teacher salaries are currently not competitive with those in other careers with comparable education levels. If America wants the best education system in the world, they must entice the brightest students to become teachers. This means raising qualification standards and increasing pay. The Equity and Excellence Commission’s report, *For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Equity and Excellence in Education*, given to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, recommended raising the average starting pay from \$37,000 to \$65,000 while raising top salaries from \$70,000 to \$150,000. Increased pay will ensure strong candidates enter the teaching profession rather than turning to more lucrative options.

This in turn will provide increased availability of high-quality teachers for high-challenge schools.

Teachers that work in high-challenge schools, schools with high rates of poverty or specializing in special needs programs, often find themselves without supplies, materials, and technology needed to be more effective. These teachers must often spend their own money for their classroom needs, yet they are held to the same level of accountability as their peers in affluent districts. This inequity must be addressed.

Teachers should be given monetary incentive to work in the more challenging districts or schools. Teachers willing to work with novice teachers or participate in leadership roles should also receive additional compensation for work done beyond classroom expectations. As teachers are the foundation of a strong school, students surrounded by high teacher turnover suffer consequences from an upheaval within the learning environment. We believe these proposed solutions will lead to less turnover and increased morale, and students will benefit from the resulting stability. The surest way to maintain our brightest teachers is to compensate them as the professionals they are.

22. Treat teachers professionally during the evaluation process, whether one is meeting the highest standards or is recommended for improvement.

While the topic of assessment and evaluation is discussed more in-depth in another area of this report, we mention it here because professionalism with the education community is key to assisting teachers to grow and develop fully.

“Excessive turnover at a specific school may also lead to the overrepresentation of inexperienced teachers, and it may suggest a lack of district oversight of deeper problems with the school environment (e.g., lack of necessary teacher support and development, poor school leadership, school safety issues) that may impair the effectiveness of teachers.”

**Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights,
United States Department of Education**

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

If the purpose of our education system is to produce citizens who participate in our democratic society, we must ensure students the opportunities to effectively collaborate, make reasonable decisions, and responsibly solve problems. Teachers are the models for our students, and our students need to observe these behaviors in adults. Policy makers, school boards and district administrators who treat teachers as incompetents send the message to students that teachers don't deserve their respect. When students don't respect teachers, they won't learn anything of value from them. We believe that honoring teacher professionalism and autonomy will teach our students to exercise their own autonomy and greatly enhance their educational experience.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Teachers

Teachers want and know what is best for students, and when they don't have the answers are fully capable of locating resources and collaborating with colleagues to figure out any challenge. But they deserve autonomy and trust in best meeting these challenges and serving their students,



along with a salary that reflects their education level. These benefits will lead to higher teacher morale and engagement and have a positive impact on classrooms across America. Teachers enter the field for the love of learning and the joy felt during teaching. When deprived of that joy by unsound policies and fear based workplaces they experience physical, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral stress that negatively impacts the school system. Absenteeism, turnovers, low productivity, and low morale can be eliminated when professionalism is recognized and autonomy ensured.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Parents

Parents' first point of contact concerning their child's academics is usually the teacher. It is the teacher who determines assessments, assigns grades, and oversees the day-to-day instructional growth of their child. Teachers are the heart of a child's educational life. Parents understand this and want teachers—professionals trained in the subject matter and education pedagogy—making key decisions that allow their children to grow. Parents turn to administrators with concerns about potential issues within the school system, but for academic concerns parents expect a teacher to use best practices that he/she is free to adjust as appropriate.

Unfortunately, depending on zip code or address, students may live in districts facing extreme challenges of underfunding. This situation often leaves districts a very shallow pool of teachers willing or qualified to work in high-challenge schools, resulting in the loss of equity and excellence. Our recommendations for teacher autonomy and professionalism assure parents that the teachers responsible for their students' education are the ones willing and qualified to accept the challenge.

“Adopting policies and rhetoric that threaten to drive some of the best and the brightest out of K-12 education is a prescription for educational disaster”.

James Harvey, *Getting Beyond the Blame Game*

RECOMMENDATION 5

Create a new restructured evaluation system of collaboration where teachers have equal voice of their annual professional growth.

Statement of the Problem

“Teachers are students themselves, just like administrators, voters and politicians are. All people are better off encouraged, inspired, respected and taught, rather than controlled through fear.”

Justin M., 360° Writing Collaborative member

True Story from the Field #1

Mrs. Jones has been teaching for several years. She loves working with kids and believes that each year she improves at her craft. Mrs. Jones knows she is a strong teacher, but under the new evaluation system finds herself being observed and evaluated by her administrator seven to eight times per year, and this makes her feel like her district doesn't trust her.

On the day she is set to be observed and evaluated, Mrs. Jones arrives at school early to make sure everything is prepared. She constantly watches the clock knowing that shortly her administrator will be in the room, checklist in hand, watching her every move. This 50-minute observation is one of several used to determine her effectiveness as a teacher, and she hopes her students remain actively engaged while the administrator is there. Due to the new rubric, any student falling off-task could negatively impact her evaluation depending on how the administrator interprets the cause.

The administrator enters the room, and for the most part the lesson goes as planned. After the administrator leaves Mrs. Jones breathes a sigh of relief, but soon stress sets in as questions flood her mind. Did the administrator like the lesson? Did they appreciate her personality and teaching style? Will they look at the big picture or focus only on the things that didn't go as well? Will they take into account all the factors and variables that were out of her control? If she disagrees with her ratings will she feel comfortable voicing her opinion without fear of retaliation, or will her score be lowered further just for questioning it? If she does receive a poor score, how will she feel coming to school every day knowing her administrator doubts her?

Can you see how this situation takes away from the joy and focus of teaching?

True Story from the Field #2

Mr. Ecker has high expectations for Jan. He knows she falls short of what's expected of her in the coming years, but the life lessons he tries imparting seem to mostly fall on deaf ears. Fortunately he has the situational power to make her care by deciding her grade.

Fear of bad grades seems to motivate Jan because she'll fail out of school with just a few more, so instead of learning how to better communicate what she needs to know, Mr. Ecker simply threatens to fail her. Initially this seems to work as he can observe measurable patterns of difference in her behavior, but her critical thinking and readiness for life don't improve because she isn't really learning. She's afraid, and fear doesn't result in creativity for any purpose except survival.

So what would we say in this instance to Mr. Ecker? That depends on what Jan needs in order to truly learn. At the very least we would encourage self-reflection on his part, modeling the same behaviors he expects from her, teaching instead of controlling, and perhaps even enlisting the help of others who have the influence to make a difference in her growth.

Oh, and by the way, Jan is a young teacher, Mr. Ecker her administrator, and the grades in question her evaluations. The constant specter of failing out of school is not helping her improve any as a teacher; rather, it shakes her up and shuts her down, opening a new door of confidence each day only to slam in her face.

Note: thousands of *True Stories from the Field* exist in our schools all across America.

Teachers are students too, and the anxiety created by constantly being evaluated can disrupt their teaching and their professional growth. As with all learners, teachers do better when being encouraged, inspired, respected and taught, not when being controlled through fear of disapproval and its accompanying threat of expulsion.

Teacher evaluations were designed with three goals in mind: to support the success of new teachers, to encourage the growth of veteran teachers, and to eliminate those teachers not doing their jobs. Unfortunately, the current evaluation process is not achieving these goals. College students are reconsidering teaching as a profession, new teachers are feeling overwhelmed and discouraged, and veteran teachers are leaving the profession in record numbers.

An administrator conducts most evaluations by observing a teacher in the classroom based on a rubric or checklist. In a follow up meeting, the administrator explains their ratings based on the rubric and what they observed. Evaluations in this way are very subjective and often prone to misrepresentation—they are 100% reliant on the observer's interpretations of what they perceived they saw in the classroom. Three observers can visit the same class and have three different opinions, perceptions, and results. This undermines the credibility of the process, breeds insecurity for teachers, and damages trust between administrators and teachers.

Teaching as a profession is difficult to evaluate because of its many variables. In addition to teaching classes, teachers are required to attend faculty meetings, professional development workshops, create lesson plans, grade student work, and score standardized assessments. These important responsibilities are often taken care of during unpaid personal time before and after school and are impossible to evaluate by observing a class. Charlotte Danielson, whose framework for teaching is used by many school systems, acknowledges the complexity of

teaching and notes the hundreds of decisions that teachers make daily and the many roles they play. There are also student factors over which teachers have no control, including those at economic risk, or struggling with emotional problems, disabilities, and language barriers, which create additional challenges in achieving student growth. Factors such as student transiency and natural differences in disposition can also make student data a challenge to analyze and compare.

Present evaluation systems have placed a misguided emphasis on the results of standardized tests. Although studies have shown that standardized testing is not a true reflection of good teaching, scores from those tests can account for up to 40 – 60 % of a teacher's effectiveness score on their evaluation. This can affect instruction as teachers resort to teaching test taking skills rather than authentic content that allows for individual student creativity. Further, evaluations don't always consider a teacher's instructional content area. Teachers who specialize in art, music, foreign language, or physical education may have their evaluation results tied to students' math and language arts scores. But the most troubling part of teacher evaluations today is the potential for administrative abuse of power over a teacher's career. If teacher evaluations are conducted unprofessionally, the evaluation process can become stressful for a teacher, creating an environment of distrust and fear.

Under the current evaluation system, if a teacher disagrees with their evaluation, they may not have any recourse to dispute the ratings without fear of retaliation. There have been instances where administrators were known to use the evaluation system to reassign or get rid of teachers they didn't like or believed were overpaid, and this contributes to a sense of fear and job insecurity. Teachers become better teachers when they are valued and respected, not controlled through fear. Teachers seek support, guidance, innovation, and new ideas and suggestions to inspire their work and help them improve, not numerical ratings derived from a rubric where political or personality differences carry influence. Teachers are required to differentiate instruction for all learners in the classroom and deserve the same courtesy by being allowed to choose their own preferred method of evaluation.

Proposed solutions

23. Restructure the evaluation process to a supportive collaboration where teachers and administrators have equal weighted voice on teacher performance and evaluations.

According to the 2009 report, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*, "Most teacher evaluation systems suffer from a slew of design flaws. These include:

- **UNFOCUSED:** A teacher's most important responsibility is to help students learn; instead, teachers are often evaluated based on superficial judgments about behaviors and practices that may not have any impact on student learning—like the presentation of their bulletin boards.
- **UNHELPFUL:** In many of the districts studied, teachers overwhelmingly reported that evaluations don't give them useful feedback on their performance in the classroom.
- **INCONSEQUENTIAL:** The results of evaluations are rarely used to make important decisions about development, tenure or promotion. In fact, most of the school districts we studied considered teachers' performance only when it came time to dismiss them.

Taken together, these shortcomings reflect and reinforce a pervasive but deeply flawed belief that all teachers are essentially the same—interchangeable parts rather than individual professionals."

It seems like the evaluation process should be simple: walk into a classroom and ask three questions: Is there an objective on the board? Are the students engaged and participating? Does the teacher have command of the class? If the answers are all YES, then learning is taking place. The current evaluation system however, as described by many on this Idea Exchange, more often resembles an administrative dictatorship where teachers seek to address the administrator's preferences, perceptions and personal agenda. Restructuring the process to a supportive collaboration between new and veteran teachers reduces administrative dominance and grants all teachers an equal voice. Administrators would no longer observe and evaluate but rather act in a supportive role for the collaboration between teachers.

There is no disputing that when teachers of the same content area share with each other new and innovative ideas that have worked in their classrooms, all who participate benefit. Teachers are resourceful and always looking for ways to improve. When we fulfill the developmental-growth purpose of teacher support by relying on content-specific collaboration between new and veteran teachers within the same school, we provide teachers with knowledge, access to resources, and support that helps refine their classroom effectiveness. Giving ownership back to teachers for their own individual growth in a supportive, collaborative model removes punitive stress resulting from administrator-teacher observation and evaluation ratings and helps foster a relationship of mutual admiration and appreciation.

24. Exclude standardized testing from playing any role in a teacher's evaluation, compensation, or retention.

Evaluation systems impact hiring, firing, placement, and compensation. The number of states using teacher evaluation systems based on student test scores has surged during the past five years. Many states require student test scores be the most significant factor in teacher evaluations. These states use value-added models (VAM), which are complicated statistical algorithms, to calculate how much an individual teacher has contributed to each student's learning.

Standardized tests might determine whether a student has learned basic content, but they cannot measure the depth of understanding or vastness of creativity found in an engaged classroom. They provide no opportunity to demonstrate multi-level learning or measurement for intuition, innovation, or character. In schools all across the country teachers who are well-regarded by students, parents, principals, and colleagues were rated ineffective after student test scores were included in the VAM statistical algorithm. The American Statistical Association has urged states and school districts against using VAM to make personnel decisions.

25. Require administrators to teach a class in order to stay in touch with current classroom issues, especially the classroom impact of education policy.

Administrators are responsible for the overall functioning of a school but generally work with educated adults, whereas teachers are responsible for growing young minds. It is a complex profession involving a wide variety of child psychologies, subject matter specificity, personality-based skills, and interlocking structural routines. Requiring administrators to teach a class every year would remind them of the complex work teaching entails, the responsibility teachers have to implement new policies, and the overall day to day nuances necessary in maintaining a successful classroom.



26. Restructure summative evaluations to include a teacher generated final report as documentation of teacher success, and furnish a clear response/recourse for teachers who disagree with/challenge administrator ratings.

Replacing the current “administrator’s-perspective-centered” nature of teacher evaluation with a new/veteran teacher collaboration and documented final report will prompt improved self-reflection and empower teachers with more direct influence over their final evaluation. This will foster positive morale and inspire teachers to seek out the professional development and collaboration they need to improve their own unique goals. This final report would include all professional development, PLC and collaborative meetings throughout the year, new strategies implemented, and documented goals they set out to improve and achieve.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

When we take away standardized test scores tied to teacher evaluation ratings, we take away a teacher’s need to teach to the standardized test, freeing them to create lesson plans encouraging student creativity and exploration. Students suffering test anxiety will be able to demonstrate learning through less stressful, teacher-made assessments.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Teachers

Clearly the evaluation system in place today isn’t working. Teachers accommodate students of various needs by differentiating instruction, so it only seems natural that teachers be afforded the same courtesy with regard to evaluations. Allowing educators to choose their form of evaluation and submit documentation of professional success grants them equal weighted voice with the principal and prevents abuse of power by administrators.



RECOMMENDATION 6

Honor the commitment for all students to receive Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), recognizing that the diversity of student needs requires diverse programs to accomplish this goal.

Statement of the Problem

According to National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA), there are currently more than 5 million English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States, and by 2025, that number is expected to exceed 25% of all students enrolled in U.S. schools. ELLs are the fastest-growing student population in the U.S., even though the majority of them are born here. Some school populations already exceed 75% ELL, and teachers feel increasingly at a loss for how to provide them with the learning they need to be successful.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (PL 94-142) mandated that students with an identified “handicapping condition” have a right to “free, appropriate” public school education. Since its passage, the issue of *appropriate* is more frequently determined judicially rather than educationally. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the incidence of children with developmental disorders in 2000 was 1 in 150. Now it is reported as 1 in 68. Additionally, there are populations of students who have not been formally identified as having unique educational needs. According to the latest census, 22% of all children are being raised in poverty, and there are increasing percentages of homeless students and others with home-based challenges.

Having high standards is not solely about preparing all students for college or careers. High standards must include programs that encourage achievable goals based on a student’s unique needs, abilities and interests. At its root, any “one size fits all” approach harms students who thrive with differentiated instruction. A “one size fits all” approach treats the student as a commodity and raises the moral question of whose best interests are being served, the student’s or the people determining policy.

Acronyms in this Section

- **ESL**—English as a Second Language is an educational approach in which English language learners are instructed in the use of the English language.
- **ESOL**—English for Speakers of Other Languages is also an educational approach for instruction in the use of English.
- **ELL**—English Language Learner is an identification of students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English.
- **ELP**—English Language Proficiency is a level of proficiency in English as a language.
- **IEP**—Individual Education Plan is a plan written by a team that meets the needs of an individual student.



Proposed Solutions

27. Provide supportive professional development for all teachers and administrators to help meet the varied needs of students.

Communication—as well as emotional, academic, and sometimes physical—needs of ELLs are challenges that loom large for today’s teachers. The following professional support recommendations are just some of the foundational blocks needed to address these challenges effectively:

- Language acquisition
- Conversation language (BICS—Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills)
- Academic Language (CALPS—Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills)
- Ability levels and what they mean
- ESOL testing—the what, the how, and the why
- Meeting social-emotional needs of ELLs
- Prioritizing needs: academic vs. social language
- Newcomers: tips and suggestions
- Cultural awareness
- Bias/ perspective training
- Scaffolding strategies
- Differentiating strategies

If we invest in proper training and support for teachers, a critical component of that training and support will be the subsequent use/creation of formative and summative assessments to benefit student learning. Trusting teachers to assess our own students’ learning and abilities further indicates there is value in the professional development provided.

Students receiving special education services have already been determined to have disabilities that cause “adverse impact” on their educational progress. Since it’s already documented that special education students are considered below grade level it can be safely assumed they will not meet passing requirements on grade level standardized tests. Forcing them to take such a test likely just wastes their time and attacks their self-esteem, and the resources used for testing could be redirected to better fit their needs. By honoring and addressing the unique needs of unique student populations, we shift the focus to preparing all students for successful adult lives.

Using IEP goals and ESOL methods as instructional targets allows teachers to implement instruction at the student’s current level and on skills carefully determined to be valuable to the unique needs of each student. Teachers won’t feel frustrated being mandated by policy to teach skills that are not achievable and in many cases not beneficial to the individual student. A large number of special education students will take alternate vocational routes and may decide not to attend college. We can help them be successful in their chosen endeavors.

Parents are an integral part of the IEP team and the ESOL team. They care about progress made on IEP goals. Parents already know their child is not performing at grade level thus requiring specially designed instruction and individualized goals. They don’t need to be informed once again that their child isn’t meet grade level standards. Instead, parents want to know which standards their child IS meeting as a result of their individualized education.

28. Extend the ELL testing exemption nationwide.

Each state gives ESOL students an exemption from the reading portion of their state test. This exemption varies from state to state and can be one, two, or three years long. As students move across the country these inconsistent exemption times are confusing and may influence assessment results. Research tells us that ESOL students take one to three years to learn Basic English Conversational Skills (BICS). Students who have more time to learn the basic skills naturally perform better on standardized assessments. If the exemption is uniform all students will be better prepared for the assessment and results will be more accurate across the country.

29. Foster consistency among states regarding testing practices, ELP standards, and ELP levels.

States currently differ in how they test, categorize and level ELL proficiencies, as well as which accommodations they provide. Teachers often have to decipher differing test scores or re-test students who move between states. Consistency minimizes academic service gaps when students move and helps maintain expectations from one area to another.

Consistency among standards, levels, and accommodations will also maximize teacher expectations for students who enter their classrooms. Alignment of standards and ELP development standards will help students demonstrate what they know rather than what they don't know and will allow teachers to provide differentiated instruction so that all students experience growth. Consistent expectations, standards, and growth levels will also help parents understand where their students are academically, and what is required to move them to the next level.

30. Limit the number of high stakes testing for SPED and ELL students including local and state testing.

High stakes testing occurs in schools and school districts several times a year—sometimes monthly—whether the assessments are local or state level. These assessments are in addition to unit and chapter tests also often required in our classrooms. The number and frequency of assessments reduces the amount of instructional time in a classroom. By limiting the number of tests given to SPEDs and ESOLs, students and teachers can focus on instruction, differentiation, and the modifications necessary for those students to learn.

31. Mandate that all testing organizations, be it for voluntary exams such as the SAT or for any mandated assessments, create assessments incorporating IEP modifications/accommodations.

IEP and ESOL team decisions regarding testing accommodations should apply to all testing situations without exception. Students will be able to access the test and the material using the modifications/accommodations in place through the IEP or ESOL team process, and assessments will more accurately reflect the individual's ability. Currently teachers are required to provide testing accommodations such as verbatim reading, scribe services, and extended time which may not align with IEP decisions.

32. Limit the number of SPED and/or ESOL students per class depending on student proficiency/ability level.

When an entire class consists of SPED or ESOL students, the teacher's instructional approach can target that general learning need which addresses every student. When a teacher has just a few SPED or ESOL students in a class, general instruction can target the mainstream students while the teacher provides individual accommodations or modifications for the SPEDs or ESOLs. Classes with 100% or 20% SPEDs or ESOLs each have reasonably straightforward approaches for instruction.

However the middle ground (a large number of SPED or ESOL students all placed together in an otherwise mainstream class) can have damaging complications for both students and teachers. A teacher with 50% SPEDs or ESOLs in their class has more accommodations to meet, which presents a challenge of instructional strategies being less appropriate for half the students and reduces the teacher's in-class availability to each individual SPED or ESOL (not to mention mainstream students who now may receive little to no attention). Placing limits on the number of SPEDs or ESOLs in the same mainstream class (except in special cases requiring or allowing for 100% of such students) would help students in every classroom experience a similar learning environment with appropriate exposures and supports.

33. Include more paraprofessional and teacher support in general education classes.

Specially designed instruction often means students working on a variety of skills with a broad range of abilities. This means the teacher needs to have smaller classes and/or appropriate support personnel to address different individualized skills and skill levels. There are currently numerous examples of effective policies and practices in this regard, but they are the exception rather than the norm. Too often students with IEP's and ELL challenges do not have the help they need to be successful in the general education classroom.

34. Incorporate vocational programs back into secondary schools nationwide.

There is an expectation that every child should go to a four-year university. This implies that any student taking a different path indicates failure on the part of the school, the student, or both. The narrow focus on college-prep style academics has contributed to the decline of vocational programs for any student interested in them. Besides indirectly demonizing these vocations, this may also deprive students of the dreams they wish to follow outside the four-year college mindset. Deliberate inclusion of vocational options resolves the exclusion of these vocations and of the students who desire them.

South Carolina has a program in which seniors can participate in paid private industry internships and complete their high school graduation requirements. The vocational internships include cyber security and computer skills such as CAD for video games as well as traditional programs. When students graduate from a well-designed, vocationally-focused school, they are empowered to immediately enter a career.



Without fear of being labeled a failing school due to reducing an overly narrow academic target, individual schools could adopt a more varied curricular focus. This would create an environment of ingenuity, variety, and even competition that can produce more effective practices and designs. The diversity would authentically provide examples of what works in a more varied spectrum. Parents would embrace programs diverse enough in course offerings to allow their child to follow his or her own strengths and interests while also growing into a well-rounded citizen.

35. Create more open enrollment school districts with varied choice of curricular offerings.

School is a time to learn and explore. Many schools today concentrate on a few subjects for several reasons. Secondary students are at a time in their lives where they need to branch out and explore different possibilities. Schools should expand their curriculum to offer more varied options. By providing students varied class choices schools give students the opportunity to explore different interests and skills that may lead to a future career or even hobby. A varied curriculum allows students to become well-rounded citizens.

36. Focus on growth measurement as determined by legally-bound IEP goals, rather than standardized tests, honoring the IEP as the most relevant measurement of student progress.

Regardless of a student's ability level, they should be provided with realistic measures and achievable goals for success. Not every student needs the same type of learning outcome or process. Measuring student growth via professionally and formally determined IEP measures should be honored, not ignored. Students taught by SPED/ ESOL teachers typically have classes that are interdisciplinary, with blurred lines among content areas. Traditional summative assessments intended for broader-population targets are not designed for IEP-centered instruction and learning.

Teachers would be accountable for actual day-to-day instruction, which is legally mandated through IEP goals versus the general curriculum for non-disabled students. Realistic measures help motivate teachers because we can rely on aligned instruction and assessment measures. Parents have been involved in establishing IEP goals for their child. They want to know whether instruction toward those goals has been successful. They do not need to receive notice from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) telling them their child is still below grade level as measured by standardized tests. Many parents want to know which skills their child is making progress in rather than which areas their child has failed.

37. Eliminate Alternative Assessments that measure watered down versions of grade level standards.

Alternative assessments designed for students with high cognitive challenges attempt to measure the same overall expectations that other students face by making the test easier, more achievable. These are seldom associated with individualized IEP goals which have been carefully tailored to meet the real needs of the students. A broad variety of students, often with completely different IEP goals, each take the same "easy" version of a standardized test. In this way, alternative assessments attempt to straddle two goals without accomplishing either: (1) make the test easier so people won't complain that it's too hard for students who have severe cognitive challenges; and (2) create the appearance that the test is genuinely aligned to grade-level

standards. Most importantly, instructional time spent attempting to pass modified grade level standards is replacing valuable time that could be used making progress toward individual IEP goals.

Unlike typical educational standards such as CCSS designed with a broader population in mind, the skills needed by students with significant cognitive disabilities are basic communication, self-help, fine and gross motor skills, social skills, adaptive skills, personal problem solving and functional academics. In addition, we serve students with severe/profound disabilities who have primarily self-help, communication and adaptive goals, making the grade level targets even less relevant and farther removed from what is achievable.

Teachers are not inherently opposed to hard work—as long as the hard work provides value to students. Examples of an alternative assessment test topics, known as skill clusters, include:

Understanding congruence and similarity using physical models, transparencies, geometry and software;

- Research to build and present knowledge;
- Know that there are numbers that are not rational and approximate them by rational numbers; and,
- Investigate chance process and develop, use, evaluate probability models.

Our most disabled students do not need to acquire skills in congruent relationships, research skills, rational/non rational numbers or probability. Our most disabled students need to follow their individualized plans and learn functional skills like reading a bus schedule or following a shopping list, skills that help develop basic number sense and apply meaningfully toward making purchases, budgeting, or maintaining a checkbook. These students need to be able to communicate in writing for functional purposes, yet because these necessary life skills are basic they are seldom, if ever, included in common core or other grade level standards. Eliminating alternative assessments based on grade level targets will free the special education teacher to stay focused on providing valuable instruction toward IEP goals.

Alternative Assessments steal time away from important IEP goals in ways not easily imagined unless they've been experienced. For example:

Recently the state of Washington began using the WA-AIM as an alternative assessment for our most disabled students. The WA-AIM is comparable to previous alternative assessments (as far as the lack of IEP correlation) and in the extensive amount of teacher time required to implement. The teacher is required to do the following:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design test items (known as “performance tasks” based on test protocol); • Gather or create materials for each performance task; • Directly implement or organize the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementation of performance tasks by paraprofessionals; • Score results; and • Record scores into a web based program. |
|---|--|

In the case of students being tested in only two areas such as language arts and math that is a minimum of 100 annual performance tasks the teacher is responsible for creating/implementing/scoring/recording. This is raised to 150 annual performance tasks for students assessed in three areas such as language arts, math and science. Considering that these totals are per student, think of the amount of teacher time required to annually assess in only two areas: six students (600 performance tasks), nine students (900 performance tasks) and respectively depending on the number of alternative assessments and the number of areas tested!

This is all time that could be spent on instruction toward IEP goals.

38. Develop assessments that use a student's individual test results as a way to show their own personal growth rather than comparing all students against each other.

Equity concerns regarding the assessments coming to U.S schools in the spring of 2015 include the Smarter Balanced (SBAC) and The Partnership of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). How can a student on an IEP be expected to perform on the same test as their grade-level classmate? These are not the first assessments to disregard special needs students, but the fact remains that with the required use of technology there is no reason these students can't have greater consideration paid to their needs. This reasoning also applies to the ELLs in our schools. Students who have virtually no skill in English are required to take the same test as native English speakers. Many IEP or ELL students lack the writing skills necessary to pass the written part of the exam. When teachers have these students in class, they can view their writing through a different lens, one that draws out their intended meaning, but computerized tests don't have this capability.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Students

As teachers it is our job to provide students with the best education possible. To do this, students with unique needs must be working toward goals appropriate for them, and need time and instruction to meet these goals. For families that move frequently, school becomes the one constant in a child's life. Providing testing consistency among states allows students to focus on learning. Offering students more varied choices in classes that include vocational training will offer more options for success in whatever path they choose once their formal education career is over.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Teachers

Teachers are professionals but also learners. K-12 curriculum is constantly changing and these changes require a heightened quality of pedagogical training. The same way some educators address "failing" students by saying the student doesn't care or isn't trying hard enough, the current system addresses "failing" teachers. We need to examine our struggling teachers and ask whether they're getting the assistance they need. Professional development of a heightened pedagogical level helps prepare teachers to teach their students. If the top predictor of student learning is the quality of their instruction and having adequate time to learn, it follows that the top predictor of teacher learning is the quality of professional development and having adequate time to learn.

Why We Believe This Will Work for Parents

Parents give us their children every day and need to know we're doing the best we can for each student. When parent confidence in the school system flounders they may feel forced to choose between trusting and blaming. By providing supports and solutions we can raise the student educational quality and parent confidence. We also create a mutual parent-teacher climate of "We're all learners". Not every parent insists their child go to college. Many simply want their child to be safe and learn in ways that help build confidence and success for the future. Providing students with a varied curriculum and vocational training gives them the space to pursue their interests and allows parents to customize support of their child. Parents can focus on finding "the square hole" instead of feeling like they must shave the edges off their "square-peg" children.



Conclusion

This report is the collective effort of 953 educators who expressed their hopes, concerns, ideas and frustrations and the 17 educators who spent hours examining these posts to collaboratively create this document. The VIVA NEA 360° Accountability and Responsibility Writing Collaborative process allowed educators a voice and the opportunity to work together to generate solutions for positive change throughout all aspects of teaching.

“In 1989, the National Board published *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*, a document that articulated the National Board’s *Five Core Propositions for Teaching* that represents what all accomplished teachers share in their expertise and dedication to advance student achievement.”

- **PROPOSITION 1:** Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- **PROPOSITION 2:** Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- **PROPOSITION 3:** Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- **PROPOSITION 4:** Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- **PROPOSITION 5:** Teachers are members of learning communities.

As such, teachers should be afforded the acknowledgement they deserve as professionals in society today, knowing all teachers share the expertise and dedication in these areas for the betterment of student success.

Walk in a teacher’s shoes for one day and you will realize just how little you know about standing in front of a classroom in today’s society. Teachers bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the process and should be central to who, what, when, where and how our education is improved. Teachers must be consulted and at the forefront, in positions of power, at local school board meetings, representing the diverse voices of our fellow teachers, enabling us to be involved in the process of creating positive change, instead of the policymakers who don’t know what it’s like to be in the trenches day in and day out.

Over the years teachers have been told, either through words or actions, not to complain, to just be thankful we have a job. We’ve been told to keep our heads down and not say what we really think, lest we face potential repercussions. We know we aren’t invincible. Life isn’t a movie where the script ultimately saves us from administrative retaliation, from being repeatedly transferred or handed the toughest teaching assignments, from being blacklisted from teaching near our homes. There are teachers who have quit or retired just so they can say what they really want without fear. It should never come to that. Today, the VIVA NEA Idea Exchange on 360° Accountability and Responsibility has shown that educators from across the country can have a vehicle for their voices to be heard, and that truth can be spoken without fear of retribution.

Thank you for your consideration, The VIVA NEA Idea Exchange Writing Collaborative Team.



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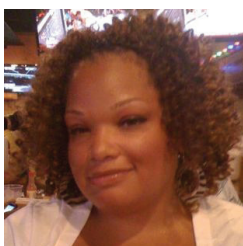
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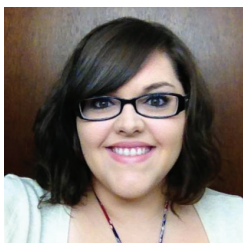
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The VIVA NEA 360 Accountability
Writing Collaborative



JAMYLE KATHY ACEVEDO is a National Board Certified Teacher who has been working with ESL students in North Carolina since 2005. She recently completed an alternative licensure program to serve as an administrator in high-need schools. Jamyle has served as a Board Director with the Guilford County Association of Educators and as a volunteer spokesperson for her local United Way. She holds a Juris Doctorate from William and Mary School of Law and a B.A. in Latin American Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



RENEE CARLSON teaches first grade at Mary Lynch Elementary School in Kimball, Nebraska. She has six years experience teaching at the Kindergarten, first and second grade levels. She is certified in early childhood and elementary education, owns a graduate degree in curriculum and instruction, and is a member of Kappa Delta Pi honor society. Renee has presented at various conferences, teaching workshops on differentiation, developmentally appropriate practices, and bridging the poverty gap. She has served as a local association president, been involved in curriculum writing, helps sponsor the Eco Club at her school, and is dedicated to promoting literacy in her community. Future aspirations include earning her doctorate in education, writing standards-based textbooks/resources specific to her home state and writing education legislation.



JANET FOSTER is a Language Arts teacher at Jefferson Middle School in Jefferson, Oregon. Previously she worked as a Teacher-Librarian in various elementary schools. She completed the Oregon Writing Project (OWP) in 2011 and the Certificate of Writing program in 2012, both through Willamette University in Salem, OR, and now serves as a Teacher Consultant for OWP at George Fox University in Newberg, OR. Janet is a strong advocate for integrating writing into all subject areas, and has been a contributor to the *Oregon English Journal*.



REBECCA GILLESPIE teaches K-4 general music, MS Drama, and MS and HS choir in Calhan, Colorado. She has 16 years experience teaching band, orchestra, choir, jazz band, music theory, humanities, drama, and general music. Since 1992, Rebecca has served as the administrative assistant and librarian for the Western State Colorado University-Colorado Brass Band, and has performed with the group since 1994. From 2007-2012 she performed with the Fountain Creek Brass Band in Colorado Springs, and from 2012-2014 with the Woodland Park Wind Symphony. Rebecca has arranged two concert pieces for brass band: *On A Hymnsong of Philip Bliss* by David Holsinger, and *Gavorkna Fanfare* by Jack Stamp. She earned a Master of Music in Music Education from Boston University in 2009, serves as treasurer of the Calhan Staff Association, and is a member of the Order of the Eastern Star.



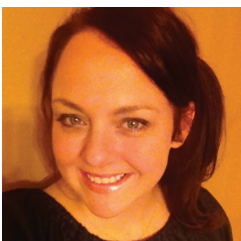
ENID HUTCHINSON has 14 years teaching experience in elementary, middle and high school settings in both Maryland and Florida. She obtained her Masters in Special Education from Dowling College in New York. Enid loves working with children and this devotion informed her decision to become a teacher. She is passionate about the current issues facing teachers today and hopes to help create positive change so desperately needed in our education system.



LORI JOHNSON has been serving adults and children with a variety of disabilities since 1979. For the past 18 years she has taught students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities in life skills classrooms, as well as students with less significant disabilities in resource room settings. Prior to teaching in the classroom, Lori provided education in home living, self help, vocational skills and functional academics to adults with disabilities in residential and vocational settings. Lori strives for all of her students to obtain the skills necessary to live life with maximum independence, maintain quality relationships, and demonstrate personal problem solving abilities.



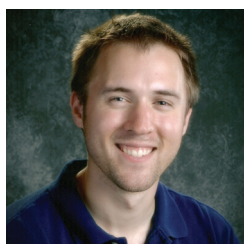
EDWARD KITLOWSKI is a Special Education/English teacher at Kenwood High School in Baltimore County, Maryland. Previously he taught both middle and high school and was Department Chairman and IEP Chairman at Sparrows Point Middle School. Edward has experience working with international students here and abroad. He was the state coordinator for summer homestays in Maryland and spent a summer teaching English in Poland. He received his Masters of Education from Loyola University of Maryland and has taken several graduate programs including the University of Edinburgh's Scottish University International Summer School program in literature. He is active in the Teachers Association of Baltimore County and the Maryland State Teachers Association where he co-chaired the committee on the impact of No Child Left Behind and initiated a national letter writing campaign to the Bush administration requesting increased educator participation in the process. He is an advocate for the inclusion of students with IEP's into the general education population and a published author whose editorials frequently appear in the Baltimore Sunpapers.



AMANDA KOONLABA is an elementary visual arts educator and National Board Certified Teacher at Lawhon Elementary School in Tupelo, Mississippi. Her background includes six years experience teaching regular education with arts integration at the first and third grade levels, writing curriculum documents for her district, and teaching art classes to all ages throughout her community. Recently she became involved in teaching curriculum and advocacy workshops at the local, state, and national levels as well. Amanda is passionate about ensuring that all students receive an education that supports the "whole child."



NANCY KUNSMAN is a National Board Certified Teacher, currently in her 16th year teaching English. She is the former president of the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English and continues to serve on its executive board. She is also a six time delegate to the NEA-Representative Assembly and has served as local building representative and vice president as well as zone treasurer. A 2012 Teachers for Global Classrooms Fellow who enjoys taking art classes and dabbling with printmaking, Nancy is always looking for ways to incorporate her passion for art and global thinking into her lessons. She envisions her students as global citizens with the ability to solve problems both critically and creatively.



JUSTIN MCGEHEE has been teaching high school ELA for 11 years after starting with a performing arts emphasis in English and a Masters of Education. He is a staunch supporter of teacher-developed curriculum and collaborates in the approach the Stockton United School District has taken to adapt for the Common Core State Standards, creating their own standards-based units of study for their schools instead of contracting out for CCSS pre-aligned curriculum. Justin considers himself a teacher second and student first, because he believes the mantra “Students learn better when they are taught better” applies not only to students, but also to teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers.



LYNN OTAGURO is a first grade teacher in Honolulu, Hawaii with 11 years teaching experience. Previously she was an attorney who represented the State of Hawaii Department of Education. The daughter of a teacher, she attended public school growing up, and later as a parent was active in her children's elementary school PTA and school community council. She made the switch to education because she sought to make an active difference in the public school system, with the goal being to give all students access to the type of education and experiences that will afford them the opportunity to have choices and power in their lives.



JOY PETERS brings 28 years teaching experience at the elementary, middle and high school levels to her current role as the only middle school ESOL teacher in Prince George's County public schools in Maryland. She serves over 70 students whose abilities range from newcomers that speak no English, to advanced level students that can compete with their English speaking peers. Joy taught previously in Minnesota and Texas, and comes from a long lineage of 10 generations of teachers on both sides of her family.



WENDI PILLARS is a National Board Certified Teacher with 18 years experience teaching English language learners, both stateside and overseas, since serving in the Army. She currently teaches at the high school level but has worked previously with all grades and proficiency levels, K-12. She has published several educational articles related to best practices for ELL's, educational neuroscience, and teacher leadership, and has worked on ETS Teacher Solutions projects, written curricula and testing questions, and presented on best practices with ELL's. She believes deeply in expanding the role of teachers and is currently working as a facilitator of Teacher Leaders within the Teacher Leadership Initiative, a joint project with NEA, NBPTS, and CTQ (Center for Teaching Quality). Wendi loves incorporating art and global connections into the classroom to enhance her learners' academic experiences.



RACHEL RICH taught middle and high school English and Foreign Language for 21 years, while leading the longest running international student exchange program between them. An early advocate of educational reform, she worked on several committees for the Oregon Department of Education to pass House Bill 3565 (The Oregon Educational Reform Act), and helped draft Oregon's Certificate of Initial Mastery and Certificate of Advanced Mastery. She received her BA from the University of Oregon Honors College and her Masters in German Language and Literature. The Confederation of Oregon Foreign Language Teachers named her Oregon Foreign Language Teacher of the Year. She served as board member for the Pacific Northwest Foreign Language Conference and president of the Oregon Association of Teachers of German. She has been a frequent contributor to various foreign language publications, and the Goethe Institute enlisted her as a regional foreign language teacher trainer.



DR. PETRA SCHMID-RIGGINS has taught at the high school level for the past 10 years, currently as a reading specialist and inclusion teacher, advocating for and teaching a diverse student population. Previously she taught K-8 for three years. She is a member of Phi Delta Kappa and Phi Lambda Theta honor society, CEC, ASCD, and NEA, and the author of *The Impact in Secondary Education: Student and Teacher Perspectives about Intentional Collaboration*. An advocate of public education and teacher leadership with a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, Petra acknowledges the inherent difficulties that arise when decisions on education are made by individuals with minimal knowledge or experience in the field, and currently works with the Teacher Leadership Initiative (TLI) to further her own leadership development and ensure such future decisions are made by educators, for educators.

THE VIVA NEA 360 ACCOUNTABILITY IDEA EXCHANGE

Bios



JIM STRICKLAND has been a public educator for the past 24 years, and currently teaches students with moderate to severe disabilities in Marysville, WA. He has served as a regional coordinator for the National League of Democratic Schools and is a contributing author in *Education and the Making of a Democratic People* (Goodlad, Soder, and McDaniel). Jim is a strong advocate of person-centered learning, democratic education, and the critical role of community partnerships in our schools.



JOSH THOMPSON is a social justice social studies educator, in his fifth year serving an at-risk population at a high school credit recovery program in Casper, Wyoming. He serves on the Wyoming Education Association's Member Advocacy and Civil Rights Commission, and is part of Wyoming's Organizing Institute cadre. Locally, he serves on the Natrona County Education Association's Executive Board and as co-chair of the Government Relations Committee, working hard to rekindle relationships with state lawmakers and other policymakers. He also serves as his building representative and is a member of a leader stakeholder group in his district. Josh is an ardent advocate for public education and himself the son of a state association vice president and local president.

Our Moderator

ELAINE ROMERO, moderator of the VIVA NEA 360 Accountability Idea Exchange, currently serves as an Instructional Coach for Albuquerque Public Schools where she supports teachers to provide quality instruction. The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics recently profiled Elaine during Hispanic Heritage Month. She has worked as an education policy analyst for the New Mexico State Senate; is a U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Alumni (2009); and is completing an EdD in Education Leadership at the University of New Mexico.

New Voice Strategies

Action

New Voice Strategies is a nonprofit corporation founded by a group of seasoned professionals who believe in an individual's ability to make our world better, fairer and more productive. New Voice Strategies created the VIVA Idea Exchange™ to offer leaders a new way to communicate with their stakeholders. The VIVA Idea Exchange™ is an online peer collaboration platform that plumbs the wisdom of committed people with front-line experience to create consensus on a variety of actionable recommendations. We believe in the power of authentic experience and provide committed people with an avenue to make a difference.

Our passion is to make their voices heard. Since 2010, New Voice Strategies has engaged more than 5,000 committed classroom teachers in peer-to-peer collaborations. Through them, New Voice Strategies offers unvarnished insights into professional visions and priorities for strengthening America's public schools from coast to coast.

Board of Directors

JILL BASS taught in the Chicago and New York City public schools for 14 years. She has a master's in instructional leadership from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and has been a professional developer, curriculum writer, educational consultant, and instructional coach. She is currently director of the Mikva Challenge's National Center for Action Civics, overseeing curriculum development and teacher training.

JEAN-CLAUDE BRIZARD is President of UpSpring Education Group, a national network of highly experienced education practitioners and nonprofit leaders who support the strategic, instructional, and operational work of school superintendents, public charter leaders, and education organizations across the U.S. and abroad. He is the former chief executive of Chicago Public Schools. Prior to his appointment in Chicago, he was superintendent of schools for the Rochester City School District in New York.

ANNA BURGER is an Advanced Leadership Fellow at Harvard University and served on President Obama's Economic Recovery Board. She was Chair of Change to Win and the first woman to head an American labor federation. Burger retired as Secretary-Treasurer of SEIU, the nation's fastest growing union, after serving from 2001 to 2010. In 2006 and 2009, Burger was named one of Washingtonian magazine's 100 Most Powerful Women.

TOM COSGROVE (Ex officio), co-founder of New Voice Strategies, brings strong experience as a message and communications strategist to our work. He has designed and implemented successful communications and grassroots campaigns for more than three decades as an environmental activist, campaign manager, political media consultant and advisor to businesses and nonprofits.

ELIZABETH EVANS (Ex officio) is the Founding CEO of New Voice Strategies. She has over 25 years of professional experience in community-based organizing and policy advocacy, strategic communications, law and policy. She is a recognized national

leader for building unconventional alliances, gathering community-based input and bringing innovative approaches to solving difficult policy problems, focusing on education policy for the last 12 years. Previously, she spent 10 years as a courtroom litigator for the United States Securities and Exchange Commission.

JOHN HUSSEY is Chief Strategy Officer at Battelle for Kids. John provides organizational and strategic oversight for Battelle for Kids and the organization's clients in the area of innovation, technology, communications, development and strategic planning. Prior to joining Battelle for Kids, John enjoyed a 30-year career in education and technology. He previously served as the regional manager for SchoolNet, Inc., helping create Web-based products to help teachers access student data and curricular standards via the Internet for use in instructional planning. He was also a middle school science teacher and technology coordinator in several Ohio school districts.

KIPLUND "KIP" KOLKMEIER is of counsel to the Political Law and Government Relations practice groups of Perkins, Coie, LLC & Kolkmeier Consulting. His legal practice focuses on state legislative lobbying in Illinois, corporate and governmental ethics issues, administrative rulemaking and executive agency lobbying, PAC management, state and federal campaign finance issues, and association management. He previously was a partner at the following law firms: Sidley & Austin, Altheimer & Gray, and Wildman, Harrold, Allen & Dixon.

ASHLEY WARLICK (Chair) teaches elementary school in the Cambridge, Mass., Public Schools. She has a concentration in teaching students with special needs and brings a strong interest in the arts to her work. She serves on the Board of Directors of her school's affiliated nonprofit organization, which brings urgently needed resources to the students at the school.



