



Creating a National Culture of Learning:

The Forum for Education & Democracy's Recommendations for the Reauthorization of ESEA

Conveners

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As individuals with decades of experience in improving public education at all levels, the Conveners of The Forum for Education and Democracy view the upcoming debates over the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as offering the opportunity to finally get it right. After a decade of tinkering around the edges and avoiding the hard questions, the so-called No Child Left Behind version of ESEA has done little to improve schools.² In fact, our schools look much like they did when the act was passed — and many think that NCLB hindered school improvement efforts that were going on prior to its passage.

While we applaud the legislation’s attention to the achievement gap between groups of students which was previously hidden in state and district reports, we concur with historian Diane Ravitch’s recent observations that the basic assumptions behind the law were unsound:

NCLB ... assumed that reporting test scores to the public would be an effective lever for school reform. It assumed that changes in governance would lead to school improvement. It assumed that shaming schools that were unable to lift test scores every year — and the people who work in them — would lead to higher scores. It assumed that low scores are caused by lazy teachers and lazy principals, who need to be threatened with the loss of their jobs. Perhaps most naively, it assumed that higher test scores on standardized tests of basic skills are synonymous with good education. Its assumptions were wrong. Testing is not a substitute for curriculum and instruction. Good education cannot be achieved by a strategy of testing children, shaming educators, and closing schools.³

Given this standard, the Forum is both encouraged by and cautious about the approach presented in the Obama Administration’s recently released “Blueprint for Reform.” In a departure from NCLB, some elements of the Blueprint offer a thoughtful approach to K-12 education reform. Specifically, the Blueprint rewards high-poverty schools and districts that make progress; acknowledges the need for more balanced assessment measures and a comprehensive education that includes the arts and sciences; and provides increased attention to the needs of Bilingual Learners⁴ and other vulnerable populations.

At the same time, the Administration’s focus on the expansion of charter schools and private management of schools; school ‘turnaround’ models that aren’t based on research; and a national culture of competition for scarce resources — as opposed to a culture of collaboration — leads us to wonder if some of the same failed assumptions that guided NCLB will be invoked in the next round of legislation.

Clearly, we need a system wherein all our students emerge with not just basic proficiency in reading and math, but also higher- order thinking skills, such as the ability to apply knowledge to complex problems, communicate

Inspiration, hunger: these are the qualities that drive good schools. The best we educational planners can do is to create the most likely conditions for them to flourish, and then get out of their way.

— Ted Sizer¹

and collaborate effectively, develop literacy in more than one language, and find and manage information. These are the abilities and dispositions that both democratic life and success in the new learning economy demands. Educational policy at the federal level should, therefore, be guided by a commitment to such outcomes for all of our children. Children and their learning must be at the center of the policy framework. Subsequently, a system supporting this goal — rather than constructing a set of regulatory constraints and gauntlets, and daring children and their teachers to see if they can get through them — needs to be built. As the Commission on the Whole Child has asked: “If decisions about education policy and practice started by asking what works for the child, how would resources — time, space, and human — be arrayed to ensure each child’s success? If the student were truly at the center of the system, what could we achieve?”⁵

By asking and answering these questions, and by rethinking the federal role in education, Congress and the Administration can usher in a new era of support and advancement for our public schools that prepares all children — regardless of circumstance — for productive citizenship in the 21st century. In particular, we must restore an appropriate balance of authority, with the federal government taking a more pro-active role in ensuring equitable educational opportunity, and a less heavy-handed, more productive role in supporting states and localities to focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. This agenda would reclaim and extend the historic federal role in public education: first, by acknowledging education as a civil right that should be made available to all on equal terms; and second, by taking on the critical tasks that demand a strong central role in building the capacity of schools to offer high-quality opportunities responsive to our fast-changing world.

Based on research — and tempered by our experience in the field and in the classroom — we encourage policy makers to rethink how we help children learn⁶ by adopting a new set of guiding assumptions. These assumptions are based on the ultimate purpose of public education; that is, as the late Forum Convener Ted Sizer put it, to teach students “how to use their minds well.” The assumptions that we propose should drive federal, state, and local educational policies in order to preserve and strengthen our system of public education:

- 1. EQUITY:** *First and foremost, all public policy must work to ensure that every child has equal access to a high-quality public education. This is a fundamental matter of civil rights.*
- 2. TEACHING:** *A high-quality teaching profession is our best guarantee that our schools will be places of excellence. The provision of such is the rightful role of federal and state policy.*
- 3. CULTURE:** *Young people will do their best work in schools where the culture is one of academic challenge, support, and engagement. Public policy should promote — not hinder — the establishment of such school cultures.*
- 4. EVIDENCE:** *Using multiple sources of evidence to measure student success will help every school community improve its work, and create an environment where what matters is not simply data — but how well we respond to it to improve the learning conditions for children.*
- 5. COMMUNITY:** *As public trusts, our schools work best when the community is engaged, valued, and involved in meaningful decision-making.*

These assumptions are drawn from our highest ideals as a democracy and from the clear and compelling evidence on how children learn. While they are broad in scope, they should be used to guide all policy decisions. We present our recommendations for the reauthorization of ESEA in light of each of these assumptions, and with an eye towards clarifying how federal educational policy can promote a more equitable and excellent system of public education for all children.

EQUITY: Providing Every Child with the Opportunity To Learn

“Given the critical importance for individual and societal success in the flat world we now inhabit, inequality in the provision of education is an antiquated tradition the United States can no longer afford.” — Linda Darling-Hammond⁷

The NCLB version of ESEA does not address the profound educational inequalities that plague children and youth across our nation. Indeed, despite a three-to-one ratio between high- and low-spending schools in most states,⁸ multiplied further by inequities across states and districts (as well as within districts), neither NCLB nor other federal education policies require that states demonstrate progress toward either adequate funding or equitable opportunities to learn.⁹ The irony of this is that the first iteration of ESEA was part of Lyndon Johnson’s War On Poverty, and was specifically designed to address the inequalities in educational access.

As Forum Convener Gloria Ladson-Billings has noted, what the U.S. has is not an academic achievement gap but an *educational debt* that has accumulated over decades of denied access to education and employment, reinforced by deepening poverty and resource inequalities in schools that continue to leave children of color, bilingual children, and the poor behind.¹⁰ Therefore, we are encouraged by the fact that Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said on multiple occasions that education is the civil rights issue of our time.¹¹

The federal government plays a unique role in ensuring the civil rights of all people, and that role has rightfully been extended in the area of education through both legislation and jurisprudence. It is time for the federal government to pay down the “educational debt” our nation owes its most underserved children by ensuring that every child in America has access to highly effective teachers and school leaders, challenging curricula, and a learning environment where they are known, valued, and supported. To this end, the reauthorization of ESEA must:

- ▶ *Link federal education funding to evidence that each state has addressed equal access to education issues:* This should include the development of an opportunity to learn index wherein each state reports both the distribution of well-qualified and highly-effective teachers; strong curricular opportunities; books, materials, and equipment; adequate facilities; and plans for addressing such inequities as they exist.
- ▶ *Address the lack of capacity within state offices of education:* Currently, too many of our country’s state education offices lack the resources they need to develop modern, longitudinal data systems, monitor funding adequacy, and serve as a resource on a host of reform issues for the districts in their states. The federal government is uniquely suited to help states accomplish these important goals.
- ▶ *Incentivize the recruitment, development, and equitable distribution of qualified and effective teachers and school leaders:* There are multiple ways the federal government could support teachers and school leaders, including scholarship and loan-forgiveness incentives; supporting teacher residency and mentoring programs; supporting differentiated career pathways that incorporate paraprofessionals in the professional pipeline; and keeping promising teachers in the classroom.
- ▶ *Meet the federal obligation for funding programs for high-need students:* Currently the federal government funds only 17% of the extra costs associated with educating students with disabilities and those who are poor; this should be raised to meet the authorized commitment of 40% of such funding.
- ▶ *Strengthen supports for Bilingual Learners:* By investing in the development of fully qualified bilingual teachers, professional development opportunities for teachers of bilingual learners, early school intervention programs, and incentives to gain ESL skills, the federal government can support this growing and underserved group of students.¹²

TEACHING: Investing in the Most Important Variable

“Without good teachers, sensibly deployed, schooling itself is hardly worth the effort.” — Ted Sizer¹³

One of the false assumptions of NCLB was that teachers could not be trusted. From scripting curricula and teaching, to invoking punishments and penalties for not achieving test score rankings, the act demonstrated an implicit disdain for the teaching profession. Despite some language that called for teachers to be ‘highly qualified’, the only attention paid to teachers themselves was found in requirements that teachers take course work in the areas they teach.

The reauthorization of ESEA must address the supply of well-prepared educators — the most fundamental of all resources¹⁴ — by building an infrastructure that ensures high-quality and continuously improving preparation for all educators, and distributes well-trained educators equitably across all schools and all communities. Indeed, investing in skilled educators is critical for ensuring that all students are college-ready, and creating the optimal conditions that can spur local school innovation. If schools are to be trusted to make good decisions about educational matters, teachers and school leaders must be deeply knowledgeable about teaching, learning, second language development, curricula, and school improvement. When the public lacks confidence in the professional judgment of educators, legislators increase bureaucratic straitjackets, even when these reduce, rather than increase, school effectiveness. Our failure to build a strong profession and to ensure that all educators have the preparation and supports they need has gradually reduced teachers’ and parents’ voices in how our children are educated. From the details of teaching children to read to rules for grade promotion, schools have had to relinquish decision-making to centralized authorities.

Unlike high-achieving nations, the U.S. leaves the supply of good teachers to chance, with no systematic approach to recruitment, preparation, evaluation, development, or retention in most states. Consequently, teachers in the U.S. enter the field with different levels of training, at sharply different salaries, and experience radically different teaching conditions. Unfortunately it is most often those teachers that work in our highest-needs settings who are the lowest paid, teach the largest classes without adequate materials, and have the least amount of preparation for one of our country’s most challenging — and rewarding — professions. Meanwhile, their colleagues in affluent communities benefit from smaller classes and more supportive working

conditions. In many states, schools serving the highest-need students additionally experience continual turnover of teachers, which undermines both student learning and school progress, contributing to the long-term failure of both.¹⁵

By contrast, higher-achieving nations have made substantial investments in teacher training and equitable teacher distribution during the last two decades.¹⁶ These countries routinely prepare their teachers more extensively, pay them well in relation to competing occupations, and provide them with time for professional learning. They also distribute well-trained teachers to all students — rather than allowing some to be taught by untrained novices — by offering equitable salaries, and sometimes offering incentives for harder-to-staff locations.

While we worry about the supply of doctors, engineers, and technicians, we seem to ignore the supply of teachers who will educate the thoughtful citizens of the future. We lack federal policies to increase the supply of good teachers, to support teachers while on the job, and to distribute good teachers to all our children.

When we do not tend to those who will nurture in our young the skills and abilities that make engaged citizenship possible, we put our future as a democracy at risk.

To start investing in a long-term teaching profession — and stop tolerating a short-term teaching force — we believe the reauthorization of ESEA must:

- ▶ *Create incentives for recruiting and preparing a pipeline of teachers who staff high-need fields and locations:* Through service scholarships, pay incentives, and resources for creating supportive teaching conditions — including reasonable class sizes, plentiful materials and equipment, time for collaboration, input into decision-making, and adequate compensation — we could consistently fill the positions currently held by unqualified teachers.
- ▶ *Strengthen teacher preparation, and make it performance-based:* Investments in professional development schools and teaching residency programs can prepare prospective teachers to integrate

seamlessly into the environments where they will likely hold their first jobs.

- ▶ *Provide mentors for new teachers:* Research shows that mentoring programs stem teacher attrition and increases teacher competence.¹⁷
- ▶ *Sustain practice-based collegial learning opportunities for teachers:* By better focusing current funds on professional learning opportunities like teacher collaboration, problem-solving and ESL methodology or sheltered instruction, the quality of teaching practices can be improved across the board.¹⁸

- ▶ *Develop teaching careers that reward, cultivate, and share expertise:* It's time for the federal government to help fund new career ladders for educators that acknowledge the role master teachers can play in school improvement.
- ▶ *Mount a major initiative to prepare and support expert school leaders:* Federal support to underwrite the development and support of innovative school leaders for our highest-needs schools will compliment the previously outlined teacher development efforts.

CULTURE: Supporting Innovations to Create Challenging and Engaging Learning Environments

“Schools did the job they were asked to do [in the past] — but never before have they done what is needed today.” — Deborah Meier¹⁹

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has acknowledged that the current NCLB paradigm is too restrictive. He has also, rightly, proposed that any new federal education legislation should be “tight on goals, but loose on means.” As we have heard from many educators and community members, the current federal policy climate has actually done more to lock in existing, failed educational practices than it has to encourage meaningful school change. In fact, in many states successful innovations were pushed to the side by the restrictive mandates of NCLB.

We take it as a hopeful sign that one of the schools recently cited by President Barack Obama as a model for the type of innovation he supports is the Met School in Providence, Rhode Island. Started by Dennis Littky, a leader in the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Met’s learning program is centered on advisories and internships, with students learning in the community and providing demonstrations of what they have learned through exhibitions. Our Conveners have started many other exciting schools, including those in James Comer’s network of elementary schools, schools started in New York and Boston by Deborah Meier and Larry Myatt, and those belonging to the League of Democratic Schools founded by John Goodlad.

Tragically, these schools exist in spite of — as opposed to the support of — federal educational policy. As the rules for NCLB were created, they limited teacher and

administrator discretion, focused attention on a narrow part of the curriculum — crowding out the humanities and arts — and specified a pre-approved list of faculty development programs and teaching materials. At the same time, the federal government exclusively embraced the promise of charter schools — schools that are released from bureaucratic regulation in order to experiment and innovate to find new ways to educate children — and ignored the need to create opportunities for innovation throughout our entire public education system.

We believe that the new ESEA must provide support and incentives for *all* types of public schools, and for the types of school change efforts that have been successful in districts across the nation — and not just embrace the narrow agenda of freedom for some and regulation for the rest. This includes rethinking the Department’s current approach on school improvement, which relies on methods from school closings to turning schools over to educational management organizations — none of which have a track record of proven effectiveness.

In order to encourage the innovation and change we believe is possible in schools, we recommend that federal policy encourage educators to develop challenging, engaging, and supportive schools for all students through the following actions:

- ▶ *Provide grants for innovation:* Programs such as the Small Learning Communities grants should be expanded, as they encompass programs that personalize student experiences and engage them and their families in new approaches to reach high standards.
- ▶ *Establish grants for dissemination:* Across the country, models of successful schools have been grown and tested and are ready for adoption and modification in new settings. The federal government could be a useful clearinghouse for this work.
- ▶ *Rethink ‘turnaround’ strategies:* The current menu of options for helping our most challenged schools is not supported by research or evidence. Rather than focusing on closing schools, firing staff, and turning schools over to private companies, attention should be focused on the proven school transformation strategies, such as extensive coaching and professional development for teachers and administrators; the creation of new small schools inside one building; and the provision of full-service schools that attend to all the needs of children and their families.
- ▶ *Eliminate competition, encourage collaboration:* Current federal policy that pits schools against one another in a contest based on basic-skills test scores merely incentivizes schools to push out high-needs children and conceal their most promising practices from each other. Instead, all federal funding should come with a requirement that any public school — charter or otherwise — is to share its best practices with an eye towards improving the entire system, and not simply identifying a few “winners.”

EVIDENCE: Relying on Multiple Sources of Information to Guide School Improvement

The real test for a student is when she is presented with something that is unfamiliar and asked to use what she has learned and the habits of hard thinking to make sense of it. That is, to make the unfamiliar familiar. — Ted Sizer²⁰

It is critically important to focus our public schools on the central goal – helping all children learn to use their minds well. This can be done through encouraging thoughtful measures of student performance criteria and developing a more useful method for charting school progress. Additionally, teachers should be supported in developing and using these measures in ways that inform instruction and curriculum.

Although NCLB called for multiple measures and for assessing higher-order thinking skills, it lacked incentives to encourage better assessments. This both undermines instructional quality and reinforces inequality, because low-income schools are most likely to experience an impoverished curriculum²¹ organized primarily around narrow, lower-level tests. The results of this myopia, not surprisingly, are low, inequitable, and declining performance on international assessments like PISA (the Programme of International Student Assessments), where the U.S. ranks 35th out of the top 40 countries in math and 29th in science — and where U.S. students fall furthest behind on PISA tasks that require complex problem-solving skills.²²

There is much to be learned in this area from prior work both in this nation and abroad. In high-achieving countries, assessments routinely include evidence of actual student performance on challenging tasks that evaluate standards of advanced learning. Curricula and assessments emphasize deep knowledge and literacy of core concepts within and across the disciplines, and ask student to demonstrate higher-order skills such as problem solving, analysis, synthesis, and critical thinking. As a large and increasing part of their examination systems, high-achieving nations use open-ended performance tasks along with curriculum-embedded assessments to give students opportunities to develop and demonstrate the knowledge, literacy skills, and abilities they will need to be successful in the 21st century marketplace. Moreover, students should be equipped with such global competencies as biliteracy, biculturalism, and multilingualism together with the ability to communicate effectively across different contexts.

A new set of measures is also essential for evaluating school progress. Currently, NCLB requires states to show 100 percent of its students reaching “proficiency” by 2014,

setting separate targets every year for subgroups defined by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language background, and special education status and labeling schools that meet any single target as failing to make AYP. It is impossible with the current metrics to distinguish, for example, between a school that shows little gain for its students on any of the tests, and one that shows substantial gains for all groups, but had a 94 percent testing participation rate on one test in one subject area, rather than the required 95 percent.

Consequently, the Forum is encouraged by the Obama Administration's Blueprint, which calls for the use of growth models. In particular, we advocate replacing the current "status model" for measuring school progress with a Continuous Progress Index that evaluates school growth on an index of measures that includes a range of assessments of student learning along with school progression and graduation rates. We also stress the importance of not setting standards so low for subgroups, such as bilingual learners, that their goals of reaching college readiness become compromised. Other indicators of school functioning could also be included, as they are in school report cards in many states and high-achieving nations.

Over the past decade, untold billions of dollars have been poured into standardized testing programs to rate, evaluate, and rank our public schools. To date, the result is that we are data-rich and information-poor. The mountains of so-called evidence have been used to do little but generate textbooks guaranteed to align to tests and tutoring programs that drill students on isolated facts and test-taking strategies. In short, we have come to embrace a national culture of testing and memorizing over a national culture of teaching, learning and literacy. The next iteration of ESEA should redirect these resources to focus on evidence of student achievement and school effectiveness in the following ways:

- ▶ *Support the development and use of assessments that measure higher-order thinking skills and advanced content knowledge and literacy:* This can be achieved through supporting states or consortia of states to develop performance assessments; moving the National Assessment of Educational Progress toward a more performance-oriented assessment; and ensuring more appropriate assessments for special education students and Bilingual Learners.
- ▶ *Use a Continuous Progress Index to measure student and school progress on multiple indicators that focus on growth and improvement:* Such an index would evaluate students' growth over time, using multiple measures and spanning the entire learning continuum, thus focusing

attention on progress in all students' learning, not just on those who fall at the so-called "proficiency bubble."

- ▶ *Support states to develop a diagnostic School Quality Review system to evaluate schools, to guide improvement, and to share best practices:* School-level improvement can be supported by adequately funding school inspection systems, like those common in many other nations. In these systems, trained experts, usually highly-respected former practitioners, proactively evaluate schools by spending several days visiting classrooms, examining samples of student work, and interviewing students about their understanding and their experiences, as well as looking at objective data such as test scores, graduation rates, and attendance and disciplinary rates.²³
- ▶ *Organize regularly available, high-quality professional development around performance-based assessment of higher-order thinking skills and deep content knowledge.*²⁴ The federal government should support states to develop an infrastructure for high-quality professional development by funding professional development time and organizing the multiple resources of the states — from universities to districts to nonprofit organizations — and ensuring that expertise and capacity are developed to address the use of performance-based assessments and the teaching strategies that support all students, including Bilingual learners and children with special learning needs.

COMMUNITY: Engaging the School Community on Behalf of Excellence and Equity

“We need to turn these citizens’ strong concern about the quality of education into powerful involvement in the schools.” — Wendy Puriefoy²⁵

While the federal government provides fewer than 10% of the funding to our public schools, NCLB has nonetheless found a way to influence the lion’s share of school decision-making. In the name of accountability, mountains of test score data drives complex Adequate Yearly Progress numbers that befuddle and confuse most parents. In state after state, federal rankings of schools conflict with state scores, leading to reports of schools that are excellent by one measure and failing by another. Meanwhile, decisions about curriculum, teaching and assessment are taken out of the hands of local decision-makers and dictated from Washington and state capitals. To continue this pattern under a proposed new set of college-readiness standards will surely lead to difficulties in meeting the needs and goals of students.

Unlike the private sector, our public schools are a public trust. They are the form of democratic government closest to the people, and yet the decisions made about schools and schooling are more and more removed from the communities they serve. In many urban areas, mayors have taken over school systems and parents find little or no outlet for having their voices heard. Private educational management organizations are given public dollars to run public schools and yet have no accountability to the public for how they spend those dollars, or to parents as to how they meet the needs of children. As a result, the ideology of the private market, with parents and children reduced to consumers, has allowed ‘choice’ to replace ‘engagement’.

This combination of dictating decisions from above and silencing community involvement from below is eroding the very foundation of public education. Rather than a system of public education that is concerned with the welfare of all children, public policy is being driven by a notion of winners and losers, where some schools thrive and others wither. But our children inhabit ALL of our schools; likewise, our communities benefit from the education of all children, not just a select few.

The next version of ESEA must address how we strengthen community supports for all schools. This is not an argument

for or against charter schools, or for or against the federal government providing guidance on curriculum or teaching. Rather, it is an argument that choice alone will not help every school improve. Dictating to schools from afar about how to meet the needs of specific children in specific locales is doomed to failure.

In the reauthorization of ESEA, we believe the following steps would improve the engagement of all communities in the support and improvement of their public schools:

- ▶ *Include specific language in the reauthorization of ESEA that prohibits the federal government from dictating educational programs or curricula:* The debacle with Reading First, where schools that were experiencing success with locally-chosen reading strategies were denied funding for these models because they weren’t federally approved, should be lesson enough that while the federal government can ask for evidence of success when using federal dollars, it cannot insist that local communities follow only one path.²⁶
- ▶ *Require public accountability and transparency in all schools that receive public dollars:* With public funding comes public accountability, and the new ESEA must require that all those who receive any public money for educational services keep publicly available financial records and provide for public/parent decision-making in terms of school programs and policies.
- ▶ *Support parental engagement and advocacy:* Resources should be specifically designated to schools to support parental engagement in schools, including funding parent/community advocates who have the capacity to communicate with all parents, especially those whose first language is not English.
- ▶ *Mandate access for all children:* Any school receiving public dollars must have its doors open to all students; children should not be excluded from a publicly funded school for any ethnic, linguistic or religious reason, nor should they be excluded due to a special need or because they are seen as ‘a poor fit.’

CONCLUSION: A Federal Educational Policy for Equity and Excellence

“The need now is for a Bill of Educational Rights and an Educational Constitution intended to ensure and renew (our) educational heritage. But it is not, however, only for the children. This legacy is also the strongest guarantee people could have that the moral ecology now holding us together will be strong enough to ensure the freedoms, responsibilities, and justice embedded in its democratic principles.” — John Goodlad²⁷

America’s public schools are a national treasure. Time and again, they have been turned to as the nation has grappled with issues of equity, economic advancement, and national character and defense. From Thomas Jefferson’s first proposals for public education to the current debates over school quality, we have always looked to our schools as a tool for making democracy possible through educating the next generation of citizens. How we conduct those schools, and how equitable and excellent we make *all* of our schools, says as much about us as a nation as anything else we do.

With the reauthorization of ESEA, it is possible once again to clarify who we as a people aspire to be. Our choices are clear: We can continue down a path in which some children go to schools that are winners and others are losers; where we ignore the civil rights imperative to provide every child with an equal opportunity to learn and every community with equal access to education resources to make that opportunity a reality; and where we continue to try and take the public out of public education. Or, as Abraham Lincoln once exhorted, we can rise to “the better angels of our nature,” and commit anew to equity, universal excellence, and engaging every citizen in the enterprise of truly public education.

In sum, it is time to create a national culture of learning. And now is the time to act.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Liz Hollingworth, "Unintended educational and social consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act," *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice*, 2009, <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-198187115/unintended-educational-and-social.html> (accessed March 19, 2010); J. Lee, The Civic Rights Project at Harvard University, *Tracking achievement gaps and assessing the impact of NCLB on the gaps: An in-depth look into national and state reading and math outcome trends*, Cambridge, MA,2006, http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3605/07EDR07_268-278.pdf (accessed on March 21, 2010); Bruce Fuller, Kathryn Gesicki, Erin Kang, and Joseph Wright, *Gauging Growth: How to Judge No Child Left Behind?* (CA, Policy Analysis for California Education, 2007) http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/esea/nclb_naep_lee.pdf (accessed on March 21, 2010) ; Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
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- 4 We opt for this term, rather than English language learner, because the latter has come to signal deficiency and further targets the English language rather than other language learning experiences that children may be presently experiencing.
- 5 ASCD, *The Learning Compact Redefined: A Call to Action, A Report from the Commission of the Whole Child* (ASCD Washington, DC, 2007) <http://www.ascd.org/learningcompact> (accessed on March 22, 2010).
- 6 To demonstrate the broad base of support that exists for a renewed emphasis on learning — as opposed to testing — in America's schools, the Forum and more than thirty other education and civil rights organizations joined together in September 2009 to launch the Rethink Learning Now campaign, a grass-roots initiative that gives people the opportunity to identify what powerful learning environments actually *look like* — and then learn about policies that would empower — as opposed to hinder — educators to create such environments for all children. To learn more, visit rethinklearningnow.com.
- 7 Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Flat World and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010), 327.
- 8 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Programme for International Student Assessment*, 2006.
- 9 Goodwin Liu, "Interstate Inequality and the Federal Role in School Finance," in *Holding NCLB Accountable: Achieving Accountability, Equity, and School Reform*, ed. Gail Sunderman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008), 103-120.
- 10 Gloria Ladson-Billings, "From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U S Schools," *Educational Researcher* 35, no 10 (2006): 3-12.
- 11 Most recently, Secretary Duncan said this in his testimony at the House of Representative's Committee on Education & Labor's hearing on the Administration's ESEA Blueprint, which took place on March 17, 2010. Testimony can be viewed at: <http://edlabor.house.gov/hearings/2010/03/the-obama-administrations-elem.shtml>.
- 12 Angela Valenzuela, "The Significance of the TAAS Test for Mexican Immigrant and Mexican American Adolescents: A Case Study," *Hispanic Journal of the Behavioral Sciences* 22, no. 4 (2000): 524-539; "High-Stakes Testing and U.S.-Mexican Youth in Texas: The Case for Multiple Compensatory Criteria in Assessment," *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy* 14 (2002): 97-116; See also, Linda McNeil and Angela Valenzuela, "The Harmful Impact of the TAAS System of Testing in Texas: Beneath the Accountability Rhetoric," 127-150 in Mindy Kornhaber and Gary Orfield, eds., *Raising Standards or Raising Barriers? Inequality and High Stakes Testing in Public Education* (New York, NY: Century Foundation Press, 2001).
- 13 Theodore R. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 4.

- 14 Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 8 (2000); See also, Ronald Ferguson, "Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters," *Harvard Journal of Legislation* 28, no. 2 (1991): 465-498; Stephen Rivkin, Eric Hanushek, & John Kain, "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement" (Working paper No. 6691 Revised, Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2000).
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ABOUT THE FORUM

The Forum for Education and Democracy is a national education “action tank” committed to the public, democratic role of public education — the preparation of engaged and thoughtful democratic citizens.

At The Forum, we work to promote a public education system worthy of a democracy, one characterized by strong public schools, equity of educational resources, and an informed, involved citizenry.

In pursuing our mission, we are guided by the following core values:

- 1.** Public education is foremost about enabling all young people to develop their strengths, use their minds well, and become connected to their communities.
- 2.** Student work in schools should be intellectually challenging, connected to the skills needed for real world success, and personalized so that children are known well by those who teach them.
- 3.** Public education is fundamental to a democratic, civil, prosperous society.
- 4.** Public schools are critical institutions for breaking the cycle of poverty and redressing social inequities.
- 5.** Public engagement, community support, and adequate, equitably distributed resources are essential to the success of public education.
- 6.** Parents and communities should be involved in all attempts to improve public schools.
- 7.** The work of education for democratic citizenship is not only the responsibility of the public schools; other cultural and civic institutions must share the responsibility of meeting the needs of our youngest citizens.
- 8.** Public policy choices affecting public education should always be assessed on the basis of their contribution to equitable educational resources, their impact on local control, and whether or not they support the public education’s most central mission - the development of free and responsible democratic citizens.
- 9.** Our children can only learn when their basic needs — from nutrition to health care and housing — are met. Our commitment to children, and to a public education system, is demonstrated by our commitment to provide these fundamental needs.

For more information, visit forumforeducation.org.