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Go Ahead. Ask. No

Demand.

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Improving education is not simple because the human beings who inhabit schools, their relationship with one another and the social system in which they live are complex and varied. While simple solutions to complex problems always fall short, the elements of effective systemic solutions in education are not so hard to imagine. In fact, they are well known.

Common "rigorous" standards for student learning, consequential testing, test-driven teacher evaluation, firing "bad" teachers, closing public schools, opening charter schools have dominated debate and education policy for the last several decades, diverting attention from more powerful levers for improvement. Instead of spurring improvement, the dominance of these measures has embroiled the United States in seemingly endless unproductive conflict with little to show for it.

There are better alternative improvement strategies about which there should be little controversy -- at least among those who value equitable education for all as the primary improvement target. Can we all agree that the goals of education are to prepare every child for a meaningful, fulfilling and productive life and informed citizenship participation. Can we all embrace the idea that great school outcomes would include knowledgeable, socially responsible, critically thinking, life-long learning, collaborating creative human beings?

Go ahead. Ask your elected officials and those entrusted with making decisions about education, if they agree. Of course, they will. However, too many avoid the next critical citizen demand: Act on and fund what we already know contributes to effective teaching and learning with those goals in mind:

- 1) Substantial, regular dedicated time for professional collaboration, reflection and growth;
- 2) A cognitively stimulating, engaging, well-balanced education that includes not just reading and math, but also science, social studies and the arts;
- 3) Daily attention to what each student's classroom work reveals about their learning progress and targeted support to move their learning forward;
- 4) Daily support for students' physical, social and emotional wellbeing;
- 5) Equitably distributed resources and class sizes that make attention and support feasible;
- 6) Support for the good health, decent housing and social and psychological wellbeing of children and their families;
- 7) Jobs for parents that pay sufficiently to ensure family stability and security.

value only work when done in unison. We know that the absence of any one of these supports undermines progress. These are the things we all want for our children.

So, go ahead ask your elected officials and those entrusted with making decision about education, if they agree. If not, demand that they tell you which ones are bad for their children. Ask for evidence. If they tell you that it costs too much, demand that they stand up and tell parents that the things they want for their children are too expensive for other people's children.

Go ahead. Ask. No, demand answers and action.

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