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How to increase grad rates

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If school district superintendents want to increase graduation rates, they should not tighten the screws on teachers to standardize students. A recent study found that teacher job satisfaction is at an all-time low, with nearly a third of new teachers saying they are very, or fairly likely to leave the profession.



This confirms my perception that teacher morale has never been lower. I lay the blame on federal government intrusion into public education, which the 10th Amendment says is a state responsibility. Ever since the "Nation at Risk Report" in 1983, the U.S. Office of Education has applied several "reforms," all based on the idea that it is possible to make students alike in knowledge and skills — and that teachers should try harder to do so.

Standardized achievement tests are used as a whip to make sure all students know and can do the same things at grade-level check points.

No wonder teachers are demoralized! They know they can't standardize students like cars or washing machines. The Common Core State Standards are the latest attempt to sell the idea of standardization to teachers and the general public.

It is setting teachers and students up for failure on a grand scale. There will be an increase in good teachers leaving the profession, more students dropping out and fewer students graduating than ever before, all because students refuse to be standardized.

To impose a generic, one-size-fits-all, common core curriculum on students will actually result in more dropouts and lower graduation rates. Higher graduation rates are only possible by making curriculum fit the students, not by making students fit the curriculum. This can be accomplished by addressing the needs of each student as an individual with unique talents to be developed and unique interests to be satisfied.

The graduation rate can be increased with a focus on developing human differences, not on human uniformity.

When I was principal of two elementary schools in northern Utah, the teachers interviewed thousands of parents over a several-year period to learn of their priorities for educating each child. The teachers discovered a different way to help students grow in knowledge and skills. They learned of parent priorities that called for students to be treated as individuals with unique talents, gifts, interests and abilities to be developed.

After a long process of experimentation with parents and teachers working together, it was discovered that student learning could be greatly increased with a focus on helping students grow in seven powers of human greatness: identity, inquiry, interaction, initiative, imagination, intuition and integrity.

If school superintendents want to curb student and good teacher dropouts and increase graduation rates, they must make school an interesting, fun and a challenging place where all students want to be. Teachers must be allowed to practice as

professionals who can recognize individual student needs and work with parents to help each child reach an amazing, God-given potential. Only those who know each student well are qualified to guide and teach each one, not those in distant government and state school offices.

If school district superintendents will make provision for teachers and parents to unite in meeting individual student needs, they will not only improve the graduation rate but they will also see student achievement skyrocket in many diverse ways, not according to standardized tests. Every child will excel in something.

A focus on enlarging diversity, rather than student uniformity, will be the most effective way to increase graduation rates.

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