

New York State Educational Conference Board

DELIVERING *on the* PROMISE

For everyone committed to improving public education



DELIVERING
on the
PROMISE

For everyone committed to improving public education

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Ed McCormick	
Influence of Business on Education	3-7
Paul Grondahl	
Accountability is Growing Up.....	8-12
Kim M. Smithgall	
Growth Model.....	13
The Accountability Issue: Contracts for Excellence	14-16
Jennie Pennington	
Skills for Life: Focus on the Standards	17-18
Les Loomis	
Education for the Future	19

2007 Relevant Educational Issues

This year has seen the largest investment of monies for education in New York State history. With this investment has come the demand for rigorous accountability. Decision makers for education such as The Educational Conference Board recognize their responsibility for delivering on the promise of educational improvement that the increased dollars represent.

This publication explores issues relevant to improved education. Alternative approaches to testing might improve accountability for student achievement. The interaction of business with education could lead to more emphasis on different skills. “Contracts” for excellence could establish criteria for accountability. New York education must continuously examine and revise standards in order to offer successful education for the future.

Needless to say, there is frequently less than unanimous agreement concerning educational issues. This publication is intended to further discussion concerning improvement in education. It is not a position paper and does not necessarily represent the positions of The Educational Conference Board or its member organizations. That thoughtful educators do not agree does not diminish the importance of their dialogue. Hopefully, this publication can contribute to improvement of learning for all students in New York State.

Ed McCormick, *Chair*
The Educational Conference Board

Member Organizations

The Conference of Big 5 School Districts

New York State Association of School Business Officials (NYSASBO)

New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers Inc. (NYSPTA)

New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS)

New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA)

New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)

School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS)



The Influence of Business on Education

by Paul Grondahl

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute President Shirley Ann Jackson has been traveling around New York State sounding the alarm in a speech she's been giving to educators, business leaders, and policy makers about what she is calling "a quiet crisis" in education. Jackson is calling attention to the gap between the nation's growing need for scientists, engineers, and other technically skilled workers and how many graduates with these skill sets America's colleges and universities are producing. More than seven million Baby Boomers are beginning to retire now and in the years ahead, which will create a projected shortfall of three million workers in the U.S. by 2012. "Our colleges and universities are not graduating enough scientific and technical talent to step into research laboratories, software and other design centers, refineries, defense installations, science policy offices, manufacturing shop floors and high-tech start-ups," Jackson says. She fears that if nothing is done, the U.S. will lose its edge in an increasingly competitive high-tech world.

"We ignore this gap at our peril," Jackson says. She calls upon government, colleges and universities, and industry to work together in order to develop the necessary intellectual capital of the future for America to retain its preeminent position and prosperity.

Jackson is not alone in her concern about this "quiet crisis." In fact, a number of college and university administrators, business leaders, and government officials across New York State are heeding Jackson's call to action. These change agents have begun taking steps to address this looming shortfall of scientifically trained and technologically skilled workers. They are fully engaged stakeholders on the leading edge of a debate that has been brewing for some time at the often contentious intersection of public education and private enterprise.

Since the early 1900s, educator John Dewey, the father of pragmatic philosophy and widely regarded as the most influential educational reformer in America of the 20th century, has dominated the long national discussion with his progressive educational theories. Dewey was critical of rote memorization of facts; repetitive learning of formulas; and mere job training that prepared a student for a specific workforce task. In Dewey's philosophy, loving and creating surpassed mere knowing; and the purpose of education, to his mind, was to nurture a broadening of the student's intellect and to develop one's capacity for problem solving and critical thinking. Dewey's many persuasive books and articles led to broad acceptance of his ideas, thus supplanting the apprenticeship and vocational training model spawned during America's earlier, predominantly agrarian culture of the 18th and 19th centuries. Dewey died in 1952, but his philosophy of education continued to burn brightly in generations of liberal arts students.

Meanwhile, Dewey's theories of education have, in recent years, run up against an increasingly vocal opposition. *New York Times* columnist and author Thomas L. Friedman has become one of the leading critics of the American educational system and its shortcomings. His reflections on the increasingly competitive global workplace and the erosion of America's intellectual preeminence in his best-selling 2005 book, *The World Is Flat*, continue to resonate across corporate America. CEOs have begun to take heed of Friedman's dire warning that cheap and accessible information technology erases past political and geographic boundaries, while a technologically skilled workforce is growing quickly in developing countries such as China and India. Friedman believes that the U.S. will soon fall behind its Asian competitors in the global marketplace without a restructuring and rededication of our educational system. In the midst of this fierce struggle to retain America's

global economic leadership there is no room for Dewey's romantic notions of loving and creating as the ultimate goals of education.

At the start of the 2007 academic year, Tech Valley High School welcomed its first class of 40 freshmen with a unique, project-based curriculum that focuses on math, science, and technology. It is the first program of its kind in New York State. It is a joint venture between Questar II BOCES and Capital Region BOCES. It was started with state funding, as well as grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private organizations. In addition, the 38 school districts throughout the Capital Region that have a student attending Tech Valley High pay \$18,000 to BOCES. The districts will be reimbursed for all but about \$4,500 of the cost. The school uses loaned space in the corporate offices of Pitney Bowes MapInfo in Rensselaer Technology Park in Troy. The mission of the school is guided by a 30-member alliance of local business people. The alliance is intended to provide a connection between the "real world" of work and business, and the curriculum at the school.

Meanwhile, at the University at Albany's College of Nanoscale Science & Engineering, 25 Albany High School students began attending Nano High at the world-class high-tech facility this fall. The \$500,000 pilot project between CNSE and the city school district focuses on helping to equip students with the skill set necessary to pursue advanced educational opportunities in the emerging field of nanotechnology. "We tried this with a few students and the response was so great and the students had such a positive experience that we decided to make it a larger initiative," said Robert Geer, assistant vice president for academic affairs at CNSE. "We stress that nanotechnology isn't about learning to make a tiny widget. It's a broad scientific know-how and technical ability that you can apply in many ways. It helps students to observe the nuts and bolts of nano science in the lab each day and also to understand the many career paths they could take in the field."

The Nano High students also receive support and get the opportunity to work in cutting-edge facilities developed by the Sematech consortium of computer chip developers at CNSE, including IBM, AMD, Intel, Hewlett Packard, and others. "When I see students coming here, I see tremendous motivation and innovative thinking and they're in our own backyard," Geer said. "We want them to leave here excited after seeing the potential of science and technology and where it can lead them in a variety of professions."

In September, Hudson Valley Community College in Troy announced it would build a \$13.5 million training center in Saratoga County to prepare workers for the Capital Region's growing semiconductor and alternative energy business sector. The new school, known as TEC-SMART, will be constructed with state funds and owned by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. It will be located next to the Luther Forest Technology Center, where Advanced Micro Devices Inc. is planning to build a \$3.2 billion computer chip industry. In announcing the NYSERDA project, State Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno said a key to drawing semiconductor manufacturers like AMD to the area is to ensure that the area has a sufficient pool of trained workers to fill high-tech jobs.

"We're trying to develop a seamless track of education from high school to college to workforce to be most effective," said Carolyn Curtis, vice president for academic affairs at Hudson Valley Community College. "We need to have more conversation to look at high school standards and to align those with college expectations and workforce realities."

To that end, some 3,000 high school students are taking college-credit courses through HVCC at their own schools. The students receive reduced tuition. About 30 HVCC students are earning degrees and certification as installers of photovoltaic systems and other renewable energy sources such as wind and geothermal in a new program that involves partnering with the state agency NYSERDA. In addition, more than a dozen students are training for jobs at the proposed AMD chip fab plant.

“We get a lot of input from our 325 advisory board members who run their own businesses and make recommendations that help us shape our college curriculum based on what they see as the future workforce needs for their industry,” Curtis said. “It’s very much a collaborative process.”

Such progressive and forward-looking educational initiatives as Tech Valley High, Nano High, and TEC-SMART are a good start, but even larger programs that involve many more students need to be developed, according to futurist Gary Marx, author of *Sixteen Trends* and founder of the Center for Public Outreach in Vienna, Va.

“Some people are telling us that by 2015, 80 percent of us will be working at jobs that don’t currently exist. That has enormous implications for education,” said Marx, a former senior executive with the American Association of School Administrators. “Schools have a great deal to learn from scientists and from people developing new technologies. Students need to leave our schools with an understanding that we expect them to conceive of new technologies that will drive our economy and improve our quality of life in the future.”

The problem with much of the educational policy in the U.S., according to Marx, is that it moves at a glacial pace that is out of touch with a fast-changing, high-tech world. “It is important for thoughtful education leaders to keep pace with change, to become dynamic leaders and not simply to remain content to defend the status quo constantly,” Marx said.

On the other hand, Union College President Stephen Ainlay believes in a process that educates students in a timeless and fundamental manner, rather than training for specific jobs that are a continuously moving target. “Surveys continue to reveal that corporations look for students who can think critically and see the big picture, write well, and speak well,” Ainlay said. “Liberal education has seen all these skills as central to preparing students and that remains true today.”

Ainlay believes school administrators at the high school and college levels need to continue to emphasize a curriculum devoted to STEM courses: science, technology, engineering, and math. He is confident about America’s ability to compete effectively against technologically skilled workers from China, India, and other rapidly developing countries. “Our advantage as a nation is our history of creative approaches to education,” Ainlay said. “The ‘discovery’ curriculum that has been introduced so successfully in chemistry and other sciences, where students have their curiosity and interest ignited by hands-on experimentation, should be exported across other areas of study. We need to ensure that our students are broadly educated so that we can maintain a competitive advantage by producing individuals who are at once competent and innovative and visionary.”

The ongoing debate about the occasionally contradictory goals between business and education can be heard in the lively discussion between a couple who has worked in both arenas, Jane and Wally Altes. Jane is the former president of Empire State College and she has also served on several national education organizations, including service as vice president of Al Gore’s task force: 21st Century Skills for 21st Century Jobs. Wally was the longtime president and CEO of the Albany-Colonie Chamber of Commerce and is a sought-after speaker on business matters, as well as a TV host.

“Business has been seeing for years now that American students are avoiding science and math, physics and chemistry,” Wally Altes said. “That may be because we don’t have teachers who inspire them or maybe because their peer group dismisses those who like the sciences as nerds. Historically, we’ve also discouraged girls and women from going into science and technology. I think there’s plenty of blame to go around in several directions. The teachers aren’t inspiring the students, and the schools are so burdened with bureaucratic rules that they can’t operate in a way that lights a fire in the students.”

Altes said he tried unsuccessfully for many years to bring together business executives and educators across the Capital Region to work on shared goals. “It didn’t work very well because when the business people and school administrators sat around the table, they spoke a different language. The business community is interested in immediate results, and education is interested in process. After an hour, the business people were tired of talking about the process and wanted a finished product. They are two very different cultures, and it’s difficult to get them to collaborate effectively.”

“Wally always thought my culture was totally nuts until he became part of a college culture a few years ago, and his perception of education has changed a lot since then,” said Jane Altes, noting that her husband is executive in residence at the Graduate College of Union University in Schenectady. “We are not great at moving quickly in higher education, compared to business, but there are many reasons for that.”

Jane had a suggestion to improve the understanding of each other’s respective cultures by encouraging middle managers of local businesses to spend time in area high schools. “I think that would help business people understand why a liberal education is important and why the challenges facing teachers are enormous,” she said.

For his part, Wally would like to see teachers undertake yearlong externships in local businesses. “Teachers need to understand what the reality of today’s workplace setting is,” he said. “You take a 50-year-old teacher who’s spent that last 25 years in the classroom and they really don’t understand the demands of the XYZ Widget Company. That’s why we have this wide gap in knowledge and understanding between education and business.”

Futurist Gerald Celente, founder of the Trends Institute in Rhinebeck, N.Y., and author of several books of trend forecasts, believes that school administrators need to look further ahead than the next budget cycle to be prepared to capitalize on future economic and social shifts. “The educational system is very reactive. They develop more forensic science classes because of a popular TV show,” Celente said. “They need to be proactive in the sense of looking far ahead to prepare for broad trends. I’m concerned because the American educational system used to be No. 1 and now we don’t win, place, or show.”

Celente said high schools and colleges should be moving aggressively into courses and programs that address what he sees as the biggest and most crucial future growth area: health care and health-related businesses.

“The U.S. is an aging and unhealthy population,” Celente said. “How are tens of millions of elderly people going to live in the future? They can’t continue to live in their McMansions, even though Baby Boomers are under the illusion that they aren’t going to get old. What should our buildings, our food production, our cities and transportation networks look like in the future to serve an exploding aged population?”

Celente also sees alternative energy and transportation as growth areas and very important business sectors in the future. “We’re spending a lot of money now on nanotechnology, when we should be spending on research to develop solar, wind, biofuel, permanent magnets, charge clusters, zero-point energy, cold fusion, and other energy breakthroughs that we’re going to need. We have the brainpower to do it, but we need to provide the educational resources to make it happen.”

Added Celente: “The educational system needs to be exploring new ways of imparting knowledge instead of using the same old platform that already exists. Our colleges must not become just training grounds that churn out drones that operate a particular machine. The other problem I’m concerned about is that education is strangling homeowners with rising tax burdens. We can’t continue like this. I’m a big believer in home schooling and distance learning, or a combination of both, as a way of relieving unsustainable tax levels.”

Perhaps the final word in the debate about the role of education and the influence of business should come from students themselves.

Cory Washington, who grew up on Long Island, is a freshman at the University at Albany. He's studying political science and is in the pre-law program, although he's not sure if he wants to become a lawyer at this point. "I want the things I learn here to prepare me for my future," Washington said. "I'm somewhat concerned, though, about finding a job after graduation. All we hear about is the fact that the job market is becoming more competitive every single day and we're getting to the point that students are going to need more than a bachelor's degree to get a good job."

Washington expressed confidence in his ability to compete against foreign-educated workers in the global marketplace. "I'll be every bit as prepared as a student from China or India," he said. "I don't think we need to push science and technology more than we're doing. I think we need to emphasize working hard and doing well in college instead of rewarding students who focus on partying and having fun."

Annalise Marrotta is a sophomore at UAlbany, majoring in human biology, with a minor in psychology. She grew up in Niskayuna and is considering a career as a physician. "I'm not really stressing out about the future and whether I'll be able to find a job," she said. "I'm focusing on making the most of my college experience and doing what is expected of me academically to succeed."

Marrotta feels that science and technology are not emphasized as much as they should be in high school and college. "You didn't even need to take science in my senior year of high school," she said. "Science and technology represents the future of our world. Choosing not to take part in those areas of study is indirectly lessening the potential of our nation. I think every student should have a solid understanding of basic science and technology."

Given her interests and career goals, Marrotta is the type of student who is already making a difference in overcoming the "quiet crisis" that President Jackson at RPI has so well described.



Accountability is Growing Up

by Kim M. Smithgall

Just as real estate's catch phrase is "location, location, location," the adage in education today seems to be "accountability, accountability, accountability."

In fact, accountability was one of the driving forces behind the introduction of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002 and continues to provide the foundation for new initiatives at both state and local levels. Among these emerging initiatives are "growth models," an assessment system that looks at students' test scores from year to year to determine how much individual students have "grown" in their knowledge and skills.

A growing trend

The option of using growth models is part of the accountability changes recommended in the recent draft legislation to reauthorize NCLB. This follows the U.S. Department of Education's approval of growth model pilot programs for two states (Tennessee and North Carolina) in May 2006 and the subsequent expansion of the pilot program to include a total of nine states.

In New York, one type of growth model, value-added assessments, was a key component of Governor Spitzer's education reform proposal. Officials in the State Education Department have already begun work on the new initiative, planning to implement a growth model no later than the 2008-2009 school year and then using that model as a platform to develop a value-added accountability system by 2010-2011.

Locally, education professionals have taken the initiative to develop training programs. "At Capital Region BOCES, we started out three years ago with 25 individuals from eight districts in our growth model training. Each year, the program has expanded and we've now provided training for nearly 300 individuals," comments School Support Services Division Director Peter Kopcha. "With the addition of Value Added Coordinator Heather Adams to our team, we've had a breakout year on a statewide basis. We're offering training across the state and working in collaboration with other BOCES."

Adams points out that the training itself has changed and evolved as more school district personnel learn about growth models and opt to participate. "We started out by giving a broad overview of growth models. Now, there's a lot more customization in the trainings in order to accommodate individual district needs," she comments.

Comparing apples to apples

So, why are growth models garnering so much attention?

"Growth models are appealing because they measure the same kids over time," says Kathryn Gerbino, assistant superintendent for instruction at Capital Region BOCES. "Our current system with AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) compares this year's fourth graders, for example, with last year's fourth graders."

"We've gotten as much value as we can out of AYP testing. Growth models are the next level," Kopcha adds.

Theodore Hershberg, professor of public policy and history and executive director of Operation Public Education, agrees. “NCLB is about closing the achievement gap, but not about measuring whether students have experienced growth as a result of instruction,” he says.

Value-added growth models can take the process a few steps further by interpreting test data to determine if students in a classroom, school, and/or district are growing sufficiently each year and pinpointing the factors that are contributing to growth, or lack thereof. In other words, how much value was added by any given teacher, school, or program to an individual student?

“You can see that this isn’t about adding more tests. It’s about using the data we receive from current tests in a different way,” comments Cohoes City School District Superintendent Charles Dedrick.

Sheila Evans-Tranumn, associate commissioner in the New York State Education Department’s Office of School Improvement and Community Services, concurs. “We believe that growth models combined with the status model currently required by NCLB can provide a more multidimensional perspective on the performance of schools and districts.”

Advantages of value-added models

Many value-added growth models being used in the United States today are based on a complex statistical analysis developed by William Sanders for the state of Tennessee. Testing data is used to determine a student’s starting point and then projects where the student and his/her classmates should be in a year’s time if they show adequate growth. According to Hershberg, Sanders’ statistical process is unparalleled because it separates out demographic factors from the equation.

“Research shows that family background is the driving force in student achievement. Students in wealthier schools tend to have the highest test scores. So, any effort to measure the success of a school or the success of teachers is unfair because it’s based on family background,” Hershberg asserts. “Value-added methodology is more fair. It separates student effects (socioeconomic status, for example) from school effects by measuring a student’s yearly growth in two different areas—the areas that can be linked to students and their family backgrounds and the areas that are affected by teachers, schools, or districts as a whole. So, wealthier communities can be compared with poorer communities in a fair way because the assessments consider individual students’ academic progress rather than how students scored on a singular test with an absolute scale.”

“Achievement, as it’s defined under NCLB and adequate yearly progress measurements,” Hershberg continues, “will always be predicted by family background, while growth will always be related to the quality of instruction.”

This appeals to John Falco, former superintendent of the Schenectady City School District and current director of the Institute for New Era Educational Leadership at the College of St. Rose. “In the absence of growth models, we don’t have a true measure of how effective a school system is or is not,” he says. “So, if you were to take a large urban district and compare it to a large suburban district—as is done in the newspapers every year—and all you looked at was whether districts were meeting standards and closing the achievement gap, that doesn’t tell you anything about instruction. It pretends to and people will say, ‘oh, that’s a good school or that’s not a good school’ based on that data, but that’s not what the data is really telling us.”

Falco explains that the same data could show significant gains for the urban districts. “In terms of effectiveness of instruction and program, we would in all likelihood find that the large urban district probably has substantially

greater increases in student growth over the 10-month academic year than its suburban counterpart,” he points out. “By and large, NCLB has shown us that’s where the achievement gaps are. And when you have gaps that large, you have a lot more room for growth.”

Value-added assessments work for moving targets, too. Districts with high student mobility rates often have lower achievement levels because students are moving into and out of different learning environments. Growth models help mitigate this factor because students are given unique identification numbers that travel with them from district to district, so their growth can still be measured.

Adding value on all levels

Educators also find growth models appealing because they show growth of students in all parts of the spectrum, whether pupils are beginning with low achievement levels or high. Individual students provide their own baselines from which to grow.

“I’ve liked intuitively the idea of growth models from the beginning because all classes have a range of students in them and you hope that you’re moving every student forward,” says Lynn Macan, superintendent of Cobleskill-Richmondville Central Schools and former assistant superintendent at Niskayuna Central School District. “With your high achievers, if you’re only looking at measures of achievement, they will always do well. It may be better to know that they’ve made a year’s worth of gains in a year’s time.”

“Overall, my hope is to look at cohorts within our larger cohorts of students at Cobleskill-Richmondville and to be able to discern for our highest-achieving students what sort of growth occurred,” Macan continues. “For our classified students, what sort of growth do we see and for the students in the middle, what kind of growth did we see?”

This information can also then be used to determine where funding can be best applied. “We recently received our first actual report with math and ELA (English Language Arts) results,” comments Bonnie Tryon, director of elementary education at Cobleskill-Richmondville and principal of Golding Elementary School. “We looked at it and found that the math scores at one school were out of this world, meaning our programs are working well; they’re well aligned and providing good value. For the ELAs, we were doing okay—there was a year’s worth of growth during the school year. So, where will we target our resources? We’ll do a little more with ELA programs and maintain the math program.”

Helping educators grow, too

Along with tracking student growth, value-added models can be helpful in determining best practices and, in turn, helping teachers and administrators grow. For example, if one classroom or grade level is experiencing better than expected growth patterns, educators can identify the instructional practices that are working and institute these practices in areas where students may be growing at slower rates.

“We believe that growth models and value-added [assessments] can be constructed in ways that will help school districts evaluate their educational practices,” Evans-Tranumn remarks. “These models should become an important input into the data-driven decision-making process of a school district.”

If enough information can be garnered about which practices work well—and those that don’t—the information can, in turn, be integrated into college-level teacher education programs and in administrative certification programs, thereby helping the next generation of teachers and education leaders.

Margaret Kirwin, dean of the School of Education at the College of St. Rose, shares this opinion, but feels the trend may not necessarily be new, just more formalized. “The most progressive institutions are already deeply engaged in this process,” she says. “There’s simply a renewed focus in the literature because of NCLB and high-stakes testing. It’s a rejuvenated focus on what’s appropriate—student growth and accountability.”

Concerns and criticisms

Even with all the advantages of growth models, education professionals also have concerns and criticisms. The complexity of the statistical analysis used to assess students seems to top that list of concerns.

“I think there’s a huge lack of understanding of value-added and other models and how they can work. It’s extremely complex and sophisticated, but I’m optimistic that it will level out to a place where it meets parents’ and community members’ demands for transparency,” Tryon comments.

Privacy issues are also cropping up. In a letter to the editor published in *Education Week*, Betty Raskoff Kasmin writes of her concern that the databases of student information required under NCLB clash with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): “... [Y]ou report that a staff lawyer for the National School Boards Association said that student privacy could become an even greater issue if states adopt ‘growth models’ to measure students’ progress...As a veteran algebra teacher with a law degree, I am leery of the ever-growing monster of linked databases that seem so easily compromised.”

The Wisconsin Education Association (WEA) is especially critical of value-added models, pointing out that they have the same inherent problems as standardized testing because the models themselves use standardized test scores. These tests are criticized for their high-stakes nature and also for failing to measure such higher-level skills as complex problemsolving, communications, teamwork, and citizenship characteristics.

Additionally, WEA officials are fearful that value-added data has the potential to be used to evaluate teachers, administrators, and schools. This may be an added concern in New York under Governor Spitzer’s Contract for Excellence, which proposes an “overhaul” in school leadership for those districts that receive aid and continuously fail to meet standards.

Falco and Macan share an uneasiness that has been voiced by numerous education professionals. “I would be concerned if we went to using strictly a growth model,” Falco says. “Regardless of what you think of NCLB, the benchmarks that have helped close the achievement gap are important.”

“I worry that there may be educators or administrators who think that if they can demonstrate growth, they never need to hit the bar,” Macan adds. “Some folks may be hopeful that the accountability piece is going to ease up, but I just don’t see that happening.”

Others, like John Merrow, educational consultant for *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* and president of Learning Matters, Inc., feel that growth models will go by the wayside. “...[T]he education ‘growth model’ seems poised to become the latest ‘best idea ever’ in the faddish world of education,” he writes.

Tryon disagrees. “Right now, value-added assessment is in its infancy. But I believe it’s going to be an integral part of the educational and accountability landscape,” she concludes. “Get ready...it’s coming.”

New York State's Growth Model

While the details of New York State's growth model have not been finalized, officials at the State Education Department have outlined the following general guidelines that will be followed as the model is developed:

- *The model will follow the core principles outlined by the U.S. Department of Education for inclusion in NCLB accountability plans (see principles below).*
- *The model will use data that can be garnered from current assessments; no new tests will be required. Also, the model will be flexible enough to be used even if New York's assessments are revised.*
- *The purpose of New York's growth model will be to measure the degree to which students are making sustained progress on a path to being academically proficient within a timeframe designated by the Commissioner of Education.*
- *The model should provide information that will help schools and districts plan improvement initiatives.*
- *Calculations used in the state's growth model should be transparent and easily understood by school staff, parents, and community members.*
- *The growth model should be implemented by the 2008-09 school year and serve as the foundation for a value-added model to be developed by the 2010-11 school year.*

Federal Pilot Program's Growth Model

The U.S. Department of Education's growth model pilot program requires participating states to show how their individual growth models align with NCLB and also with the following core principles:

- *The model must ensure all students are proficient by 2013-14. Also, it must have yearly goals to close the achievement gap for all groups of students.*
- *High expectations must be established for low-achieving students without regard to student demographics or school characteristics.*
- *The model must include separate measures of achievement in math and reading/language arts.*
- *All students within the tested grades must be included in the assessment and accountability. Also, schools and districts must be held accountable for the performance of all subgroups, and the statewide accountability system must include all schools and districts.*
- *The state's NCLB assessment system must include annual assessments in grades three through eight in math and reading/language arts. These assessments must be in place for more than one year and receive approval through an NCLB peer review process.*
- *The model must yield comparable results from year to year and grade to grade, as well as track student progress.*
- *The model must include student participation rates in the state's assessment system and student achievement on an additional academic indicator.*



The Accountability Issue: Use of “Contracts for Excellence”

by Jennie Pennington

It is an exciting time for public education. The New York State Legislature has committed significant money in a multiyear effort to improve education for New York students. Part of the \$1.8 billion 2007 increase in New York State funding for education includes an accountability program based on a “contract” monitored by the New York State Education Department. With the increased aid comes the legislative constraint that schools be accountable for better results.

Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2007 authorizes the Commissioner of Education to establish programs and activities for schools that receive a Foundation Aid increase of either \$15 million or 10 percent of the amount received in the base year, whichever is less. In the first year, 56 school districts representing over 1600 schools are included in the group. As of October 22, 2007, the Commissioner has yet to approve any of the “contracts.”

The statute requires the Commissioner to set the format by which each school district will report its expenditures. At a recent meeting of the Board of Regents, the “contracts” were described as “works in progress,” with emphasis on the interaction between the school districts involved and the New York State Education Department.

The following regulations currently guide the process.

Specifically, the proposed (contract application) will establish:

- 1. requirements for the preparation and submission of the contracts for excellence, including a requirement that the New York City School District include a plan to reduce average prekindergarten through grade 12 class sizes within five years;*
- 2. the allowable programs and activities under the contracts, which are limited to: (i) class size reduction, (ii) student time on task, (iii) teacher and principal quality initiatives, (iv) middle and high school restructuring, and (v) full-day kindergarten and prekindergarten programs;*
- 3. criteria for experimental programs, not included in the allowable programs and activities, that are designed to demonstrate the efficacy of other strategies to improve student achievement, and for which the Commissioner may authorize a district to spend up to 15 percent of the contract amount;*
- 4. requirements for school districts to develop their contracts for excellence through a public process, commencing with the 2008-09 school year, which shall include at least one public hearing and be made in consultation with parents or persons in parental relation, teachers, administrators, and distinguished educators appointed pursuant to Education Law section 211-c;*
- 5. requirements for procedures by which parents may bring complaints concerning implementation of contracts for excellence; and*
- 6. requirements for school districts to publicly report their expenditure of total Foundation Aid.*

The specificity of the document may help school districts direct Foundation Aid toward best practices to improve learning. As a “work in progress,” aspects of the format may have been drawn from school proposals.

- *Smaller class sizes are frequently proposed. Buffalo City specifies a 20:1 student-teacher ratio in grades 1-3; a 25:1 ratio in grades 4-5. Schenectady specifies a 20:1 ratio in grade 6.*
- *Several improvement initiatives allow more student time on task. Brentwood High School has added an additional period to the school day. Buffalo City added an additional hour for students and developed an agreement with the teacher bargaining unit to clarify the teacher workday.*
- *Additional remedial reading and math instruction is the focus of several proposals. Schenectady City locates an intervention specialist in reading and in mathematics at each middle school.*
- *Parent involvement through a hearing process or as a result of information on a school district website occurs in several districts.*

The New York State Education Contract Application Worksheet asks eligible school districts to provide “fiscal accountability, performance accountability, and program accountability.” Student subpopulations in need must be identified by numbers and by group characteristics. Performance and improvement sought for each subgroup must be identified and connected with programs shown to improve student performance. Staff development and training should be described.

Maria DeWald, president of the New York State Parent-Teacher Association, believes it is essential to the success of the initiatives to have parent awareness of and involvement in their development. Parents are not expected to make final educational decisions, but parent and community participation and support of improvement programs have been shown in numerous studies to produce positive results. The specificity of the latest guidelines should assure parent involvement in the process.

Effective use of the increased funding is emphasized in every communication between New York State educational decision makers. Members of the Board of Regents press for details concerning development of the “contracts” at each of their meetings. Each additional discussion moves the contract process closer to a functional definition of accountability. Successful targeting of Foundation Aid could go a long way toward easing the tension between government and school improvement. Results of these improvement initiatives hold the promise of better education for students in New York State.



Skills for Life

Today's students live in a changing world; schools need new ways to help them thrive

by Les Loomis

State learning standards define crucial goals for schools and students to pursue. The standards are reflected in the courses and exams that students must pass in order to earn a high school diploma. According to independent authorities, New York's standards and assessments rank among the very best of any state in the nation.

Increasingly, however, educators are questioning whether those standards aim at the right targets. Many college freshmen find it necessary to take remedial courses. Many employers express disappointment with basic math and writing skills of recent graduates.

With our highly rated standards and assessments, we can hope that New York graduates would fare better in comparisons. But there is another concern: whatever the quality of our current standards, whatever our success in helping students attain them, they need to change if schools are to equip young people for the demands the future will impose on them.

Part of the challenge was framed by the *New York Times'* Thomas Friedman in a December 2006 column. He asked, "Why should any employer anywhere in the world pay Americans to do highly skilled work — if other people, just as well educated, are available in less developed countries for half our wages?" Friedman's answer is that American workers will get paid a premium "...only if they or other firms offer a uniquely innovative product or service, which demands a skilled and creative labor force to conceive, design, market and manufacture — and a labor force that is constantly able to keep learning."

Parents and employers recognize that for students to succeed when they move to the next level of education and beyond, it is not content knowledge that counts, but the ability to apply skills and knowledge in different contexts. Our new standards must put greater stress on developing the capabilities that Friedman suggests.

These include analytical reasoning, problem solving, writing, thinking across disciplines, and working in a team.

continued...

They also encompass personal behaviors that prepare students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning — persistence, gauging their own performance, seeking help, and pacing their work to meet deadlines and expectations.

Approaches to content knowledge must change as well. Most of the nations we regard as economic competitors shun our practices of racing to cover a wide swath of material in each subject, each year. Instead, they focus on assuring that students comprehend core concepts and ways of thinking in each discipline. That same approach is employed in American colleges and universities.

Fortunately, New York State is acting to ensure that schools are pursuing the right goals for our young people. The State Legislature accepted Governor Spitzer's proposal to begin updating the state's learning standards, a process that the State Education Department has begun. New York's school superintendents want to put forward some principles that should guide that work.

First, the standards should be developed with the end in mind: what should young people know and be able to do if they are to succeed in college or the workplace? Thinking and problemsolving are the new basic skills.

Second, before taking the obvious step of reviewing standards for each subject separately, one after another, the effort must be considered as a whole. The most essential skills cannot be taught in just one subject or just one year.

Third, the work of revising standards should engage representatives from higher education and of employers, not just schoolteachers and administrators. School professionals may be too quick to jump to considering how standards could be taught and tested, and not adequately anticipate what will be expected of students once they cross beyond schoolhouse doors.

Fourth, because knowledge keeps expanding and skill demands continue changing, the process of updating standards can never stop. The state must plan to continuously repeat the cycle of reviews.

Fifth, the exercise must consider how the new standards will be assessed. Teaching to the test cannot be avoided, so we need tests that are worth teaching to.

Standards are a starting point but state tests are what truly signals priorities to schools and teachers. New assessments must reinforce the priority that all students need to develop higher order thinking skills and that all teachers and school leaders bear responsibility for helping them reach that goal. Assessments should be more skill-based; mastering subject matter knowledge alone should not be enough to earn a passing grade.

Earlier this year, the Council of School Superintendents called for recognition of education as a civil right. The civil rights movement of the last century challenged all Americans to be true to our best heritage by finally assuring all our citizens equal treatment under law. Now we must guarantee that all children can have the quality education we would demand for our own children.

Delivering on that promise begins by assuring that our schools teach the skills and knowledge that our children must have to thrive in the world they will inherit from us.

Reprinted by permission of the Albany Times Union.

- SUMMARY -

Education for the Future

The intense focus on improvement of education increases pressure to describe as accurately as possible what education should have become in five or ten years. That task is difficult. Beyond agreeing that students should know about and practice technology, and that learning should prepare students to change careers several times, schools have made rather tentative efforts to simulate the challenges of future work situations and life experiences. Internships and “service learning” initiatives balanced with mathematical, scientific, and communication skills may represent effective initiatives. One cannot blame educators if they see “all this testing” as clutter that hinders preparation of students for their preferred futures. A song from Bruce Springsteen’s recent album “Magic” states, “We’re livin’ in the future.” The “future” of the song is ominous, for “the wild dogs run.” Springsteen provides a metaphor for planning for education. Solace comes in a not-really-reassuring refrain, “Don’t worry...Don’t you fret. None of this has happened yet.” There may be time to fix education.

While speaking informally recently, New York State Commissioner of Education Richard Mills provided a description of education as it may evolve in the soon-to-be future. Some salient points emphasized by Commissioner Mills follow:

- *We can expect more attention to effective practice. There will be expectation of a “trade craft” in every classroom.*
- *Educators will give more attention to the students and parents we serve. We will offer very good customer service.*
- *Prekindergarten will be foundational.*
- *Curriculum and instruction will be more data-driven than ever.*
- *All educational decisions will reflect a P-16 orientation.*
- *Fundamentals will be continuously reviewed in order to closely connect standards with practice.*
- *We will see a consolidation of regional units in order to become more efficient and more effective.*
- *Global competition will increasingly drive educational decisions.*

Commissioner Mills’ comments blend the desirable with what he sees as practical for educational improvement.

Business will continue to influence curriculum, but it is unrealistic to assume that all career training will occur as part of an educational program. Educators and society will continue to seek effective methods of measuring student achievement, but validity concerns will continue. Standards for effective education will be foundational to school improvement and drive good instruction, but continued focus on standards remains challenging. The issues represented in this publication reflect an urgency imposed by society and government. Dedicated and passionate educational leaders can deliver on the promise of school improvement if they see that the future of education is now.



New York State Educational Conference Board

Edward McCormick, *Chair*
c/o PO Box 3207
Poughkeepsie, New York 12603
Phone: 845-485-1502
Fax: 845-485-1501
E-Mail: info@nysecb.org