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QUALITY EDUCATION RESULTS FROM STATE AND LOCAL INNOVATIONS

BY GOVERNOR TERRY E. BRANSTAD*

As the most recent chair of the Education Commission of the State,¹ Chairman of the National Governors' Association² during the first National Education Summit in 1989, and a member of the working group for the second National Education Summit,³ I have developed a great appreciation for the state of education throughout this country. No experience, however, has been more valuable in shaping my view of our nation's education needs and in convincing me that local and state officials should bear the primary responsibility for educating our children than my service as Governor of the State of Iowa. Iowa is one of the leaders in the nation in every major indicator of student success. We have a proud tradition of quality schools. Our students rank well in comparison to the other industrialized countries. In fact, ninety percent of Iowa schools achieve above the national median on nationally standardized tests,

* Governor Terry E. Branstad, who is serving his fourth, four-year term as Governor of Iowa, is currently the longest serving governor in the nation. In 1997, he served as Chairman of the Republican Governor's Association, the Education Commission to the States, and the Governors' Ethanol Coalition. When elected, Governor Branstad was the youngest governor in Iowa history. He served in the Iowa House of Representatives from 1973-79, and as Lieutenant Governor from 1979-1983. A former attorney and farmer, Branstad served in the U.S. Army from 1969-1971.

1. The mission of the Education Commission of the States is to help state leaders develop and carry out policies that promote improved performance of the education system as reflected in increased learning by all citizens.

2. The National Governors' Association (NGA) is a bipartisan organization made up of the nation's governors. The association's mission is to provide a forum for Governors to exchange views and experiences among themselves, assistance in solving state focused problems, information on state innovations and practices, and a bipartisan forum for Governors to establish, influence, and implement policy on national issues. The NGA was founded in 1908 after the Governors met with President Roosevelt to discuss conservation issues. The Governors decided to form an association through which they could come together to discuss their mutual concerns and act collectively.

3. The goal of the Education Summit is to build commitment among participants for prompt actions that will help states and communities build consensus, develop and implement high academic standards, assessments and accountability. Former President George Bush convened the first Education Summit with governors in 1989 and called for a national standard in education.

and Iowa is consistently in the top three states on the American College Testing⁴ program, the Scholastic Aptitude Test,⁵ and the National Assessment of Educational Progress and other measures.⁶

That success is accomplished in an environment that does not establish minimum graduation requirements at the state level and does not have state-required curriculum or textbooks or a state test that all students are required to take and pass before graduation. Iowa also has a long and successful tradition of placing authority for education decision making at the local level.⁷

It is no coincidence that Iowa has a long tradition of strong community ownership of education.⁸ That local commitment has resulted in high academic expectations for young people, and there is a strong commitment to school improvement to enable more students to achieve at higher levels consistent with increased workplace needs.

This profile has allowed Iowa to invest differently in supporting elementary and secondary education. Our primary goal is to improve student achievement by improving classroom instruction. The State of Iowa has invested more than \$26 million annually, about \$800 per teacher, in locally determined professional development since 1989.⁹ Iowa is now in the second year of a five-year state program that adds \$150 million to local districts for technology and technology training as determined by local plans.¹⁰

Iowa's needs, of course, are different than those in other states. In California, a focus has been to allocate resources to reduce class sizes.¹¹ In Connecticut, a major push is under way to rebuild and repair local and elementary schools.¹² In Montana, school-to-work initiatives are a key priority.¹³ These diverse objectives vividly demonstrate why local and state officials, not federal officials, should have primary responsibility.

4. Mark Siebert, *Iowa ACT Scores Up*, DES MOINES REG., Aug. 14, 1997 at 1.

5. Mark Siebert, *Thanks to Iowans, SAT Math Scores Edges Up*, DES MOINES REG., Aug. 23, 1996 at 6.

6. Jane Norman, *Iowa Schools Still in Forefront, But Latest Test Raises 'Yellow Flag'*, DES MOINES REG., Feb. 28, 1997 at 1.

7. Mark Siebert, *Study: State Has No Standards for Students*, DES MOINES REG., July 29, 1995, at 5.

8. *Leave Schools to the States*, DES MOINES REG., Aug. 1, 1997 at 12.

9. IOWA DEPT. OF EDUCATION, *IOWA'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM: PHASE III STATE REPORT* (Des Moines, IA 1989-90).

10. Thomas A. Fogarty, *Senate Clears Education Bills*, DES MOINES REG., Jan. 26, 1996 at 6.

11. Brad Hayward, *Schools Big Winner in New Budget*, SACRAMENTO BEE, May 15, 1997 at A1.

12. Lizabeth Hall, *Funding Sought for Schools, Libraries, Voters Also Consider Residency Rule for Harford Workers Referendum*, HARTFORD COURANT, Oct. 31, 1996 at 20.

13. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, OPA PRESS RELEASE: MONTANA AWARDED \$1.8 MILLION FOR STATEWIDE SCHOOL-TO-WORK PROGRAM (MAY 18, 1998).

I shudder to think where Iowa would be today if Thomas Jefferson and our other founding fathers had elected to centralize authority over education in the federal government. Of greater concern, however, is what will happen to our children in the decades ahead if we make the mistake of centralizing education in Washington.

I have had the opportunity to witness great innovations in our schools which do not originate from the corridors of the federal Department of Education, but rather with the fifty states enabling and guiding local school districts, teachers and parents. The federal government can be of assistance, but in its regulatory, directing mode it is more often the obstacle to innovation.

The current public discussion on national testing illustrates this point. The President and others believe we should take a new dangerous leap towards centralizing control of education in Washington.

President Clinton said his proposal to create a national test for all fourth graders in reading and all eighth graders in math is completely voluntary.¹⁴ However, he has also stated that the Administration's goal is to recruit twenty states by 1999, and all fifty states by 2002.¹⁵ All too often we have seen how a "voluntary" program of the federal government quickly becomes a virtual mandate on states.

The President's "new" national test is not the solution to the problems of American education. I am pleased that members of Congress intervened with their questions last year.¹⁶ The national testing initiative is neither a cost-effective way to help states ascertain student needs, nor a solution to determining how best we can educate our children.

A national test is a simplistic approach to education reform. The problem is not necessarily that testing is a bad idea. If implemented properly, testing gives states and local schools information about how students are achieving. However, the initiative for national testing virtually ignores all the education research on what we now know about how to improve schools and student learning. The solution is to allow the states to put forth comprehensive education reforms, without the interference of Washington.

Iowa has made significant investments in fiber optics, computer technology, and distance learning.¹⁷ Education expenditures made up approximately

14. Peter Baker, *Clinton Takes Governors to Task Over Education; Bypassing Statehouses, President Signs Up 15 Major Cities for Student Testing Plan*, WASH. POST, July 26, 1997 at A9.

15. *One Standard for All Pupils*, THE ECONOMIST, Sept. 20, 1997.

16. Peter Baker, *Clinton Presses Education Initiatives on Testing, Literacy Tutors*, WASH. POST., Oct. 21, 1997 at A8.

17. See Governor Terry Branstad, Testimony Before the *House Committee on Education and Workforce*, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Field Hearing (Nov. 3, 1997) (transcript available at <<http://www.state.ia.us/government/governor/edtest.htm>>.). See also Governor Terry Branstad, Address at the *3rd Annual International Summit on Service to the Citizen* (Oct. 9, 1997) (transcript available at <<http://www.state.ia.us/government/governor/>>).

58.5 percent of Iowa's budget in 1998.¹⁸ I have introduced a comprehensive proposal to reform education in Iowa, focused on three goals: 1) improving and professionalizing teacher preparation; 2) making sure that young children receive what it takes to get off to a good start; and 3) holding schools accountable with locally set standards for academic achievement.¹⁹

Many states have considered the construction of state or local standards in order to increase the accountability their schools have in the eyes of the students, parents, and taxpayers of their communities. I firmly believe that setting strong standards at the local level is a positive step for education reform, especially in states that have a tradition of local control over education.

A national test would not adequately measure locally adopted standards. A test which does not measure the curriculum being taught will be an ineffective tool in improving student achievement. The national testing proposal could potentially create a set of de facto national standards in the areas of reading and mathematics and do nothing to improve student learning in these subjects.

Whatever potential benefits exist in promulgating a national test can be achieved through improving existing testing vehicles.

Fortunately, the Clinton Administration has now recognized the value of the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS)²⁰ and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).²¹ Yet, they still believe another test is necessary for all students. The experts however disagree with this opinion.

The National Assessment for Education Progress has provided us with the indicators and information we need to make improvements.²² The NAEP results are based upon a random sample of students constructed by experts.²³

The Third International Math and Science Study has disclosed that teaching methods must be changed and improved in order to successfully affect student learning.²⁴ It is important to address these issues, in order to move forward with education reform.

denver.htm>).

18. Ken Sullivan, *Lawmakers Agree: Top Priority is Education*, CEDAR RAPIDS GAZETTE, Jan. 13, 1998, at 1.

19. IOWA GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION, STATE OF IOWA COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, FINAL REPORT (Sept. 1997).

20. *The Third International Mathematics and Science Study*, (May 1996) (available at <<http://www.2kpbsd.K12.ak.US/TIMSS/purexl>>) [hereinafter TIMSS].

21. NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION PROGRESS (1999) <<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>>.

22. Sullivan, *supra* note 19, at 1.

23. *Id.* at 1-2.

24. TIMSS, *supra* note 21.

The expense of administering a national test is a main concern. The Administration's proposal would cost taxpayers approximately ten to twelve dollars per student, per test.²⁵ Other current assessments, like the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, can be administered for as low as 88¢ per student.²⁶ The Administrator's proposal is that the federal government would pay for the initial pilots in 1999.²⁷ However, when this is finished, the cost could be passed on to the states. Can states afford this kind of mandate when there are so many other improvements that we are making to address education reform more holistically?

We need to determine the most effective use for limited federal dollars. The need for research which is geared to reforming our schools is critical. Therefore, many questions plague this issue: Do we have the funds to conduct national research to guide reform efforts for teacher education programs and effective teacher practice?; What assistance is there for research on effectively using emerging technologies in our classrooms?; Do we have resources to aid in the creation of the methods and materials that can transform and improve teaching and learning?

State governments, and ultimately, local school boards are in the best position to know the needs of the children. Our education systems must reflect the social, cultural and economic values of our communities. Those local values are best determined by the people who are most accountable in that area; parents, local administrators, teachers and school board members. The well-financed public interest advocacy groups in Washington, D.C. are too far removed to know these local values.

In order for the State of Iowa to best educate its students, we need relief from the stringent regulations that will prohibit us from maximizing our resources to improve education. We need quality data and information to make informed decisions, and, we need quality educational research to determine the needs of the children. Accountability for the use of tax dollars is crucial. However, unnecessary regulations create burdens instead of encouraging the innovation that is needed to meet the educational needs of children.

In order to improve education in America, we need to allow the states more flexibility to continue and expand the programs that they know are beneficial. We must work toward improving teacher preparation before we give them the responsibility of educating our children. We need to incorporate

25. CORNELIA M. BLANCHETTE, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ISSUES, GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, STUDENT TESTING - ISSUES RELATED TO VOLUNTARY NATIONAL MATHEMATICS AND READING TESTS (1998).

26. IOWA TESTING PROGRAMS (University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 1999). Iowa Testing Programs test only Iowa students for 88 cents per student. Riverside Publishing tests students outside Iowa at a higher cost.

27. BLANCHETTE, *supra* note 26, at 27.

what we have already learned about the benefits of new teaching methods into our systems. Finally, we need to hold our schools accountable to the standard by using strong, locally set standards. A new national test will not help with any of these necessities; instead it will serve only to create bureaucratic micromanagement of America's classrooms at the taxpayers' expense.

In the end, there is not one solution to improving education that will work universally in every state. Adding competition, choice, school-to-work and charter schools to the discussion is necessary, but ultimately, it is local and state officials, not federal bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., who know how to most effectively educate the students for whom they are responsible.