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Getting To Excellence: What Every Educator Should Know About Consequences of Beliefs, Attitudes, and Paradigms for the Reconstruction of an Academically Unacceptable Middle School

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Getting to Excellence

What Every Educator Should Know

about

Consequences of Beliefs, Values, Attitudes, and Paradigms for the
Reconstruction of an Academically Unacceptable Middle School

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Foreword by Dr. Yvonne Blanchard-Freeman

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Chapter One

The External Environment

The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.

Aristotle

But what we need is honest school improvement that acknowledges both high standards and high quality of school input. The standards movement as it is now progressing at the national and state level is half the solution to the problem. To establish the standards of output without having standards of input is a travesty. To hold children responsible for outcomes without giving the same level of sophisticated attention to guaranteeing the standards of exposure is an abandonment of the responsibility of adults for the education and socialization of children

Asa Hilliard

www.blackeducationnow.org/id17.html

In this chapter a discussion of a salient dimension of the external environment in which today's educators find themselves practicing – the policy context - is presented. Critical elements of this discussion include a truncated history of the encroachment on local control of the schools and the ensuing standardized-tests-based accountability and standardized testing movement. We also pay some attention to growing efforts to push back against these movements. We conclude this chapter with perspectives of a set of scholarly informants on quality, equity, and adequacy. Our effort in this chapter is to trace the political distance traveled from education defined by the diverse beliefs, values, attitudes and paradigms specific to the New England, Middle, and Southern colonies to the current emphasis on standardized-tests-based accountability, standards, and testing as they impact or fail to impact quality, equity, and adequacy – the context in which the Willie Ray Smith, Sr. Science and Medical Technology Magnet Middle School was previously branded academically unacceptable but now academically acceptable.

In the New England States the population was predominantly Puritans who believed that people must be able to avoid the deluder Satan and that the way to do so was through reading the Bible.

Therefore, the inhabitants of this area concluded that in order to save their souls, individuals had to be educated in order to learn to read their bibles. Rippa (1997) explained that the New Englanders advocated that equally important was the belief that an educated citizenry allowed for a better functioning democracy. This conviction led to the Federal Acts of 1642 and 1647 (Old Deluder Satan), which enforced compulsory education and stipulated that parents could be fined if the students of that household were not educated. The New England Colonies consisted of settlers in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. Settling on the coast, these individuals were economically inclined to shipping and merchant businesses.

Puritan, these persons were the most educated in the New World and believed that moral character was critical to a productive society. They believed that one must be able to avoid Satan and that reading the bible was instrumental to that. In order to read the bible, one must be educated, and thus education was a major factor for them (Rippa, 1997). They wanted everyone to be educated. The first core-curriculum school began there. Instruction was teacher led, discipline was strict, and the strategy was repetition and rote memory (Rippa, 1997). The first reading and writing schools as well as primer schools were developed in the New England Colonies (Rippa, 1997, Butler, undated).

The Federal government initially played a lesser role in the Middle Colony with its diverse cultural composition (Quakers, Irish, Dutch, Germans, Catholics and other religions). This may be attributed to their strong desire to preserve their religious freedom. The Middle Colonies include Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Delaware. The major economy in the Middle Colonies was farming. The main concern of this citizenry was the preservation of their religion more than an interest in education. There was the development of parochial schools, denominational schools and utilitarian schools for skill and trade. These states even had charity schools, but they were not well accepted because of the fear of losing their religious preference.

Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland and Virginia make up the Southern Colonies. Settlers in Georgia were mostly released prisoners. Other settlers in the South were slaves, indentured servants, or rejects from the other colonies and Europe. Religion was a social activity for these people; there was no concern for educating everyone. There was more of a

concern with maintaining individual social classes. It was feared that educating slaves would result in not having any of them to perform the manual labor. There were great distances between plantations. The wealthy provided private tutors for their children or sent them to school abroad (Rippa, 1997). Young ladies of the south were taught graces and the males were taught about authority.

The late 17th and early 18th centuries were characterized by implementation of Federal guidelines, similar to the Acts of 1642 and 1647. As industry grew it became more feasible to provide free schools based on taxes. The workingman's movement with its social unrest saw more and more political involvement and participation in elections as more offices were made available to the popular election. Also the Union movement became more involved with social protest than economic protest (Rippa, 1997). At the same time the thought developed among the American born that new immigrants must be taught the naturalist mindset. Therefore, in the New England Colonies, The Massachusetts Law of 1852 made education compulsory for youth ages 6-16 (Sass, 2012).

As the economy grew and communication and transportation developed, the "Common School" emerged. Ideally, the "common school" was to be a free, publicly supported, publicly financed, and state controlled school, according to Horace Mann, the first secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education -- who is considered the leader of the Common School Movement.

In an article, *The Standards Movement – Past and Present* (Jones, 1996), Dr. Jones reports that in 1894, a group of scholars known as the Committee of Ten called for an established academic curriculum for all high school students. He also, revealed that approximately two decades later, the "Cardinal Principles", developed by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education noted that the topics dealt with in schools should depend "chiefly upon the degree to which such topics can be related to the present life interests of the pupil" (Gagnon, 1995).

Conversations about standards and examining the quality of education in the United States have spanned these last eighty years. Although traditional course content and core subjects have endured, novel instruction techniques and reform of educational policies seek to maintain

traditional achievement aims while satisfying bureaucrats and business owners. These competing goals continue to be at issue (Wheatley, 2012).

Additionally, even though the educational practices of the New England Colonies had expanded to the West, the mindset of the Southern Colonies continued to spread as well (Richards, 2008). In 1954 in the case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed its decision of 1896, and rejected the “separate but equal” doctrine; but, changes in the South were slower in coming than in other parts of the country. Later we find the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed major forms of discrimination against African Americans, including among other issues, racial segregation in schools (Lewis, Undated). This legislation led to school busing controversies and ushered in “equal education” issues addressed through the adoption of several Federal Acts and Title Articles. These Articles include “The National Science Foundation Act of 1950” to promote education and basic research in the sciences; “The Indian Education Act of 1972 – Focus on Culturally Related Academic Needs”; Title I – Improving Achievement of Disadvantaged Children; Title II – Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund; Title III -- Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students; Title IV – Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities; Title V – Innovative Programs (i.e., Charter Schools, etc.); Title VI – Improving Academic Achievement, Standardized-tests-based accountability, Grants for State Assessments and Enhanced Assessments; Title VII – The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law 89-10 [1965]) authorized funds for general use and was amended in 1968 with Title VII, to address needs of children of “limited English speaking ability”; Bilingual Education Act; Title VIII – Impact Aid for districts affected by federal activities (federal property and taxes); and Title IX – Affirmative Action specifically for women in that “no person in the U. S. shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance (Super, 2005).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a concern that the United States’ educational system was falling short of the implicit goal of keeping American students better educated than students in the rest of the world. Longtime United States’ industries were challenged by high quality products produced less expensively overseas in foreign countries. Many people believed

this was due to American students falling behind their foreign counterparts in learning the skills necessary to keep the American economy afloat. Consequently, the federal government initiated steps to examine the quality of the education students in United States' schools were receiving (Harris and Herington, 2006).

On August 26, 1981, the effort to maintain traditional achievement aims while satisfying bureaucrats and business owners was again placed at issue. The National Commission of Excellence in Education (NCEE) first met, at the request of Secretary of Education, T. H. Bell. Bell organized this committee of eighteen due to his concern about "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system." (Introduction, The National Commission on Excellence in Education (April 1983) *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*). At that meeting former President Reagan stated "Certainly there are few areas of American life as important to our society, to our people, and to our families as our schools and colleges" (NCEE, 1983). The Commission's charge was specific to assessing the quality of teaching and learning in our Nation's public and private schools, colleges, and universities; comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations; studying the relationship between college admissions requirements and student achievement in high school; identifying educational programs which result in notable student success in college; assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement; and defining problems which must be faced and overcome if we are successfully to pursue the course of excellence in education. (NCEE, 1983).

The Commission's education sources included the following: papers commissioned from experts on a variety of educational issues; administrators, teachers, students, representatives of professional and public groups, parents, business leaders, public officials, and scholars who testified at eight meetings of the full Commission, six public hearings, two panel discussions, a symposium, and a series of meetings organized by the Department of Education's Regional Offices; existing analyses of problems in education; letters from concerned citizens, teachers, and administrators who volunteered extensive comments on problems and possibilities in American education; and descriptions of notable programs and promising approaches in education. Its report concentrated primarily on secondary education, and was entitled "A Nation

at Risk.” “The Imperative for Educational Reform” was released April 26, 1983 (Bcenglis, 2012). In its report the Commission stated findings and made recommendations.

The Commission’s finding and recommendations appear to have been of special interest to mathematics educators; and the first standards to be developed were mathematics standards, written by members of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), in 1989. Theirs’ ushered in what we now know as the “the standards era” with the 1989 publication of Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics, which was updated in 2000 as Principles and Standards for School Mathematics (Finn and Kanstoroom 2001). .

In September 1989, all fifty state governors and President George H. W. Bush convened in Charlottesville, Virginia, for an education summit. President Bush and the Governors made a commitment to establish measurable goals for education reform that they named America 2000. They agreed on a process for developing the goals that would involve teachers, parents, local administrators, school board members, elected officials, business and labor communities, and the public at large. Their charge was to establish a common mission for improving education for all. The goals the panel agreed upon were released by President Bush in his State of the Union speech, on January 31, 1990.

During the same convention, the groundwork for the National Education Goals for the year 2000 was created. In March 1994 President Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Goals 2000 encompassed the goals established at the Charlottesville education summit as well as additional goals. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act also established the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC), which had the responsibility to review and certify voluntary state and national education standards that were being developed. Simply put, business leaders and politicians reasoned that if total quality management principles worked in business, they ought to work in education (State University, Undated).

Educational reforms relating to standards and assessments began in Texas in the 1980s. Early on, the state adopted two minimum competency tests, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) and the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimal Skills (TEAMS). In 1983, Governor Mark

White appointed a commission of business leaders, chaired by H. Ross Perot, to recommend educational reforms. Their work led to passage of H. B. 72 which focused on student achievement, assessment of teachers, and school funding. Assessment initially, took the form of “minimum competency” tests which later were replaced by statements about what students should know and be able to do known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

To help ensure that all students will learn at acceptable levels, Congress enacted legislation entitled No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001. The act required all states to set standards for what a child should know and learn for all grades in mathematics, reading, and science. In addition, the states were required to set a level of proficiency for determining whether the standards are met by the student (NCLB). Each state Department of Education has its own process for developing, adopting, and implementing standards. As a result, what students are expected to learn can vary widely from state to state. These standards became the basis for the way teachers are trained, what they teach and what is on state standardized tests that students take (Rudalevige. 2005). By this law, state and local educational institutions are challenged and must prepare all students academically to become globally competitive. Each year across the country campuses and districts are rated on the federal level for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). “AYP is a measurement defined by the United States Federal No Child Left Behind Act that allows the “U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized tests” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adequate_Yearly_Progress, Heilig, Young, and Williams, 2012).

According to the Department of Education (2012), “AYP is a diagnostic tool that determines how schools need to improve and where financial resources should be allocated.” Those schools that do not meet AYP for two years in a row are identified as "schools in need of improvement" and are subject to immediate interventions by the State Education Agency in their state. First steps include technical assistance and then, according to the Department of Education, "more serious corrective actions occur if the school continues to fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress. All kindergarten through twelfth grade schools are required to demonstrate AYP in the areas of reading/language arts, mathematics, and either graduation rates, for high schools and districts, or attendance rates for elementary and middle/junior high schools” (Edurite, Undated).

AYP (2012) allows states to be in charge of developing their own criteria for meeting AYP and must submit them for approval. “These requirements include ten specific guidelines”: (Texas Education Agency, 2010) and “requires that states use standardized assessments in order to measure AYP” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adequate_Yearly_Progress). “The Texas Education Agency lists three areas that serve as indicators on which a district or campus may be evaluated for AYP: Reading/English Language Arts, Mathematics, and one of the Other Indicators (either Graduation Rate or Attendance Rate for high schools)”. (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

For Title I districts and campuses, missing AYP on the same indicator two years in a row triggers Title I School Improvement Program (SIP) requirements. A district or campus must meet AYP on the indicator that triggered SIP for two years in a row to exit the Title I SIP requirements (AYP, 2012). In addition to the federal AYP rating, the State of Texas through its Texas Education Agency (TEA) implements its own state-developed standardized assessment. This assessment is modified periodically. A recent assessment was the Texas Assessment of Academic Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Test (Texas Education Agency, 2010). There were four categories associated with the TAKS test. These categories included: Academically Unacceptable, Academically Acceptable, Recognized, and Exemplary.

Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year TEA implemented the new State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessment. For this test there are three possible categories of ratings: Level III: Advanced Academic Performance, Level II: Satisfactory Academic Performance, or Level I: Unsatisfactory Academic Performance. Currently, there are no set standards for determining success or failure. However, student performance on this instrument is used to determine Adequate Yearly Progress.

With respect to standards, it was believed that if one set up standards, one could then prod the educational system into producing student achievement as measured by tests, that would strive to match the standards (Jones, 1996). Some such as Dr. Shaun Kerry, author of Education Reform: The "Tough Standards" Movement, have expressed that many of our elected officials

have entrusted the control of our schools to corporate interests, because corporations provide a majority of the funding required to sustain our political parties. (Kerry, 1999-2002).

With respect to testing, the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy at Boston College compiled data from *The Bowker Annual*, a compendium of the dollar-volume in test sales each year, and reported that while test sales in 1955 were \$7 million (adjusted to 1998 dollars), that figure was \$263 million in 1997, an increase of more than 3,000 percent. Today, press reports put the value of the testing market anywhere from \$400 million to \$700 million (pbs.org, 2002).

According to ProCon, “The earliest known standardized tests were administered to government job applicants in 7th Century Imperial China, built upon a rigid "eight-legged essay" format, tested the applicants' rote-learned knowledge of Confucian philosophy and were in widespread use until 1898. The Industrial Revolution ushered in a movement to return school-age farmhands and factory workers to the classroom; “standardized examinations enabled the newly expanded student body to be tested efficiently” (<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>). In the mid-1800s, Boston school reformers Horace Mann and Samuel Gridley Howe, modeling their efforts on the centralized Prussian school system, introduced standardized testing to Boston schools; “Boston's program was soon adopted by school systems nationwide” (<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>). Concerns about excessive testing were voiced as early as 1906, when the New York State Department of Education advised the state legislature that "it is a very great and more serious evil to sacrifice systematic instruction and a comprehensive view of the subject for the scrappy and unrelated knowledge gained by students who are persistently drilled in the mere answering of questions issued by the Education Department or other governing bodies" (ProCon, 2012).

We also learn from ProCon that “the modern testing movement began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, which included testing and standardized-tests-based accountability provisions in an effort to raise standards and make education more equitable” (<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>). The 1983 release of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, a report by President

Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education, warned of a crisis in American education and an urgent need to raise academic standards. (ProCon, 2012).

Finally, the "No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed with bipartisan support (381-41 in the House of Representatives and 87-10 in the Senate) and was signed into law by President George W. Bush on Jan. 8, 2002" (<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>). The legislation, modeled on Bush's education policy as Governor of Texas, mandated annual testing in reading and math (and later science) in Grades 3 through 8 and again in 10th Grade. If schools did not show sufficient "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP), they faced sanctions and the possibility of being taken over by the state or closed. NCLB required that 100% of US students be "proficient" on state reading and math tests by 2014, which was regarded as an impossible target by many testing opponents. (ProCon, 2012).

A major problem with this scenario is the belief that performance on a paper and pencil test is predictive of performance in the work place (or in life for that matter). Believing this is one thing. However treating it as real is what is known as reification. Put in Sirotnik's language regarding or treating "an abstraction as if it had concrete or material existence" (Sirotnik, 1990). Sirotnik goes on to characterize the misuse of standardized tests for accountability purposes as silly as in "At best, the idea that the scores students get on a bunch of multiple-choice test items somehow indicate the quality of their schooling is silly." He goes on to address perceived quality or goodness of schooling based on test scores with "consider, as another example, how the goodness of schools has become reified in the form of score averages on standardized achievement tests. Politicians make judgments of the educational at-riskness of the entire nation based on cyclical downturns and upswings of these average tests scores. States get all excited and pass various and sundry educational reform legislation" (Sirotnik, 1990). Thus, the issue becomes one of extents to which it can be understood, using paper and pencil tests, if students have acquired requisite knowledge and life skills. Sirotnik's response would be "A test score average provides very little basis for this kind of understanding."

Eisner, writing in the Kappan, goes further with "we ought not to forget that what we are after is far more than high scores on standardized tests. We need to remind ourselves that the function of

schools is broader and deeper and that what really counts is what people do with their lives when they can choose to do what they want to do. In fact, I would argue that the major aim of schooling is to enable students to become the architects of their own education so that they can invent themselves during the course of their lives” (Eisner,2003). Thus, argue Cummings and Johnson (in press) what schools should be accountable for – what should be the new gold standard – is the assurance that students have acquired the knowledge and life skills associated with such real life phenomena as health, education and lifelong learning, the election of politicians who will act in ones interest, risk taking, home ownership, the accumulation of wealth, choosing, getting and holding a job or position, avoiding interaction with the criminal injustice system, and longevity.

Moreover, negative connotations of standardized testing have been recognized through: 1) teachers (assumedly) teaching to the test, 2) teacher and student stress, 3) decreasing time spent in other essential parts of the instructional day and 4) test bias. At the onset of the school year, it seems as though the race is on. Readiness and support standards are being infused into lessons and planning so that students are not only mastering new objectives, but, also, learning how to use what they already know to assist with learning new concepts. Although great teachers and those who aspire to be great teachers do their best to adhere to classroom practices that are true to the art of instruction, as well as, the heightened demands of success with standardized assessments (i.e. increased paperwork and planning and decreased instructional time), some feel so much pressure for their students to achieve a specific score that they do end up teaching to the test, whether they want to or not. This can make school drudgery for students and steal teachers’ enjoyment of teaching (Margie, 2011). As such, there is an abundant amount of pressure being put on students, teachers and schools due to dread of substandard scores (Johnson, Berg, And Donalson, 2005).

Margie, also, writes in Pros and Cons of Standardized Testing that this can lead to negative health consequences as well as feelings of negativity directed at school and learning in general. This sentiment may be compounded when students’ down time is taken away, especially at the lower levels. Some class periods, like band, drama or even health provide an opportunity for students to switch gears and relax.

Finally, testing bias can rear its ugly head at almost any time. So, even though testing instruments go through several reviewers, some terms, phrases, or vernacular may slip past. Subsequently, it may be unlikely that each student taking the same test as thousands of other students have absorbed the same knowledge in the same period of time. Therefore, some are apt to be unfamiliar with some of the terms and that unfamiliarity may cause responses not necessarily incorrect from their experience, but incorrect as a test item response on that instrument.

While industries are focusing on their monetary stability, schools are beginning to cater to their demands, even at the expense of individuals and communities. Stability of the workforce is driving students swiftly through the educational experience. When teachers are affected via stress, burn-out, frustration or other workplace difficulties, those feelings may be addressed somewhat immediately due to means made available to professionals who are pertinent to the educational process. However, students have it tougher when their way gets confusing and frustrating. The rigor and momentum of instruction that caters to standardized testing may irritate them to the extent of dropping out of school, which many do, especially in low SES income communities. According to this Education Week report, low-income students will be at greater risk than their affluent counterparts because they tend to start school with fewer academic skills, their parents are less able to help with homework and their schools tend to have fewer resources (SparkAction, 2002). These scenarios lead to impoverished communities because the young are not experiencing success with education, and they become adults ill-equipped to support themselves and their families adequately. Employers are looking for educated, professionally trained and presentable employees. When students do not graduate or are not able to be competitive in the job market, they lose out. They lose out on financial stability, health care provisions and ultimately, a happy and meaningful life. The community yields fewer and fewer constituents to intelligently elect and support political leaders whose initiatives may revitalize their community.

In a speech at a conference at Howard University, Asa Hilliard, Professor of Urban Education at Georgia State University, made the following statements with which we prefaced this Chapter:

But what we need is honest school improvement that acknowledges both high standards and high quality of school input. The standards movement as it is now progressing at the national and state level is half the solution to the problem. To establish the standards of output without having standards of input is a travesty. To hold children responsible for outcomes without giving the same level of sophisticated attention to guaranteeing the standards of exposure is an abandonment of the responsibility of adults for the education and socialization of children (Hilliard, 1998) .

Dr. Hilliard's position is being supported in several Texas newspaper articles, letters and online journals. Authors of these publications ranging from government to education have expressed their concerns, opinions, views and recommendations regarding standardized testing in the state of Texas.

Valerie Strauss of the Washington Post online reports that more than 100 school districts in Texas passing a resolution saying that high-stakes standardized tests are “strangling” public schools... The article shares that state-mandated standardized testing has become so dominant in Texas that, high school students are spending up to 45 days of their 180-day school year taking them, according to the Times Record News and Denise Williams, testing director of the Wichita Falls Independent School District. She goes on to state that in Texas this past spring, students starting in grade three took new exams called the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR, which are supposed to be more “rigorous” than previous assessments. In high school, “what used to be grade-specific exams are being replaced “by 12 end-of-course tests that will be linked to graduation and final grades.

Concern has arisen among educators and parents due to the deep budgets cuts which they feel could leave schools unable to meet the tests' new demands and that there has been unprecedented talk against testing mania. The basis for their concern is due to many issues; first, the state education commissioner, Robert Scott, said the mentality that standardized testing is the “end-all, be-all” is a “perversion” of what a quality education should be; he also attacked the Common Core Standards Initiative as being motivated by business concerns. Then he agreed to

postpone by a year a requirement that the results of each end-of-course exam account for 15 percent of a student's final grade in that course. Kelli Moulton, the superintendent of Hereford Independent School District, was quoted by the Texas Tribune as saying that she was considering not turning into the state Education Department her students' STAAR results. So far, more than 100 districts have passed the resolution that says an "over reliance" on standardized high stakes testing is "strangling our public schools and undermining any chance that educators have to transform a traditional system of schooling into a broad range of learning experiences that better prepares our students to live successfully and be competitive on a global stage."

The Washington Post

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/in-texas-a-revolt-brewsagainst-standardized-testing/2012/03/15/gIQAI5N0VS_blog.html

Posted at 12:05 PM ET, 03/23/2012 The Washington Post

The Texas Tribune reported that Texas Commissioner of Education, Robert Scott, spoke at the TASA midwinter conference addressing 4,000 school officials in Austin, Texas February 1st, 2011 saying that the state testing system today has become a "perversion of its original intent" and that he was looking forward to "reeling it back in." Scott said that he believed testing was "good for some things," but that in Texas it has gone too far and that he was frustrated with what he saw as his "complicitness" in the bureaucracy that testing and standardized tests- based accountability systems have thrust on schools. Lawmakers slashed state funding to public education by \$4 billion. The budget cuts have spurred at least four different lawsuits against the state from school districts arguing they have not received adequate funding to meet increasingly high state accountability standards. How these new rules will impact grading policy and effect variation among districts were discussed at a recent House Public Education Committee hearing. Scott said today that if he had the authority, which he said he doesn't, he would waive the 15-percent requirement in the first year as students adjusted to the test because he predicts that there will be a "backlash" against standardized testing during the next legislative session. However, he said that the new tests, which are course-based rather than subject-based, would be better for students in the long run and that the transition provided a chance to create a new accountability system that accounts for "what happens on every single day in the life of a school besides testing

day.” “We have a huge opportunity to move kids farther and better than we ever thought possible,” Scott said. “And I do not want to blow that opportunity.”

The Texas Tribune

Texas Schools Chief: Testing Has Gone Too Far

by Morgan Smith

1/31/2012

The Dallas Morning News weighed in reporting that high-stakes standardized testing is “strangling our public schools,” superintendents of several high-performing North Texas school districts have jointly signed a letter to top state officials and lawmakers warning about the deterioration of the education system. The letter goes out to back up Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott, according to Coppell Superintendent Jeff Turner. So the superintendents wrote that they completely agree with Bill Hammond when he writes, “If we do not deliver a quality education system that prepares our students for college and careers, Texas’ ability to attract new business, improve our economy and maintain our competitiveness will surely falter. Our very prosperity as a state, its business and its people stands in the balance.” However, we completely disagree with the idea that the way to success for all students is through more standardized tests. In fact, we believe that more tests where students memorize and fill out bubble answer sheets in order to graduate will continue to keep us from being able to reach the very goals upon which all Texans agree.

The strain among top education leaders is over how to break in a new set of exams, known as the STAAR tests. Texas Tribune had a piece quoting a letter from four state senators, including Plano’s Florence Shapiro, who wants there to be some give for local districts as they break in the new tests. One thing is clear, the momentum belongs to those who object to the way tests have come to dominate school life. The Robert Scott comments were an opening that they didn’t want to let get away. In an email from State Board of Education member George Clayton after the Scott transcript, Clayton, who works for DISD, illustrates the money and the pressures involved in high-stakes testing in a state as large as Texas. He goes on saying “as an educator and an education official in this state, I have made it my crusade to expose and ultimately end this travesty in our schools.”

Open rebellion against standardized school tests in Texas

By

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[[<http://dallasmorningviewsblog.dallasnews.com/authors.html#Rodger Jones/Editorial Writer|Bio>]]

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Standardized Tests ProCon.org “is a nonpartisan, nonprofit website that presents facts, studies, and pro and con statements related to standardized tests” (<http://standardizedtests.procon.org>). It is reported that standardized tests have been a part of American education since the mid-1800’s. Standardized tests are defined by W. James Popham, former president of the American Educational Research Association, as “any test that’s administered, scored, and interpreted in a standard, predetermined manner.” The tests often have multiple-choice questions that can be quickly graded by automated test scoring machines. Some tests also incorporate open-ended questions that require human grading, which is more expensive, though computer software is being developed to grade written work also. “Their use skyrocketed after 2002’s No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandated annual testing in all 50 states” (<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>). US students slipped from 18th in the world in math in 2000 to 31st place in 2009, with a similar decline in science and no change in reading. Failures in the education system have been blamed on rising poverty levels, teacher quality, tenure policies, and increasingly on the pervasive use of standardized tests. They present a pro-con debate exploring the use of “high-stakes” standardized tests in US elementary and secondary schools, and do not address college admissions tests such as the SAT, ACT, and GRE. “Many kinds of standardized tests are in use, but high-stakes achievement tests have provoked the most controversy” (<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>). These assessments carry important consequences for students, teachers and schools: low scores can prevent a student from progressing to the next grade level or lead to teacher firings and school closures, while high scores ensure continued federal and local funding and are used to reward teachers and administrators with bonus payments. Standardized testing in the US has been estimated to be “a multi-billion-dollar industry,” though proponents have

accused opponents of exaggerating its size. The largest test publishers include NCS Pearson, CTB/McGraw-Hill, Riverside Publishing, and Educational Testing Service (ETS). “Proponents argue that standardized tests are a fair and objective measure of student ability that they ensure teachers and schools are accountable to taxpayers, and that the most relevant constituents – parents and students – approve of testing”(<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>). Opponents say the tests are neither fair nor objective, that their use promotes a narrow curriculum and drill-like “teaching to the test,” and that excessive testing undermines America’s ability to produce innovators and critical thinkers.

The Texas Classroom Teachers Association (TCTA) stated that after a growing backlash from parents, educators and State Board of Education members against the outsized role standardized testing is playing in our state education system and a clarification of intent from state leaders, Commissioner of Education Robert Scott deferred implementation of the new 15% grading requirement tied to the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course (EOC) examinations. While the law still requires students entering the 9th grade in the 2011-12 school year and thereafter to achieve a cumulative score on the EOC exams to complete graduation requirements, the commissioner’s ruling, which applies to the 2011-12 school year only, allows districts to determine whether to include EOC exam scores as part of the final course grade. Districts have dealt with much confusion and agitation as they struggled to determine how best to incorporate the 15% requirement into grades. TCTA, along with numerous parents, educators and superintendents, called for a delay in moving forward with STAAR. A major concern was the looming drastic funding cuts to programs like the Student Success Initiative, which had operated in the past as a safety net for students struggling on state tests. However, calls for delay were met with stiff resistance by key Senate leaders and certain business groups, who characterized them as “retreating” from the high standards that would ensure Texas’ ability to compete in a global economy.

Efforts in the House then turned toward making changes in the system to mitigate the impact of STAAR, primarily via House Bill 500 authored by House Public Education Committee Chair Rob Eissler. The bill would have allowed local school districts to decide whether or not to count

EOC exams as 15% of a student's grade in the corresponding course. It would also have modified the scoring requirements that students would have to meet on the EOC exams in order to graduate, and allowed some of the high school students required to take EOC exams to instead continue to take the TAKS test for a set amount of time. Although the bill had near unanimous support in the House, it was dead on arrival in the Senate and failed to pass. Still, the concerns had not diminished and the Speaker of the House issued an interim charge to the House Public Education Committee in October to examine the impact of STAAR on students, instruction, teachers, and graduation or promotion rates. The committee held a hearing on this charge in late January, with much of the testimony centered on the 15% requirement and how it would impact student GPA's and college admissions. Although it was pointed out during the hearing that districts have total discretion on whether to use course grades incorporating EOC test results in calculating GPA's, committee members were sympathetic to claims of the inequity of holding students, but not schools, accountable for the new test during the transition year.

Texas AFT Legislative Hotline

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Value Added or Values Misplaced?

Posted on May 11, 2012 by Texas AFT Staff

Finally, the Dallas Observer reported that several Dallas ISD trustees are not keen on supporting a resolution brought forward by trustee Carla Ranger to protest an over-reliance on standardized testing. Trustees discussed the resolution, which is supported by at least 250 Texas districts and calls for using multiple assessments to determine student performance. The resolution states that too much emphasis on standardized testing can result in "relentless test preparation and boring memorization of facts to enhance test performance." Groups supporting the resolution include the Texas Association of School Administrators and the Texas Association of School Boards. Texas Education Agency Commissioner Robert Scott also has spoken out against an overemphasis on standardized testing. Some of the worry centered on whether the resolution is in conflict with state law, which requires that students take the state's exam annually. They also noted that standardized testing is used to gauge student learning. Some superintendents who support the resolution have contended that the new STAAR exam has a flawed framework by

having one-day high-stakes testing that doesn't reflect what happens in school all year. But despite that, school ratings are largely based on the state exam. Some trustees were confused as to what it all means. They were doubtful that the state would really consider doing away with its annual exam. Standardized testing is going to be around forever for the rest of our lives, but kids shouldn't be over tested; to prevent it would be to cut out some of the local testing, such as benchmark tests.

Several DISD trustees lukewarm on resolution to protest overtesting

Tawnell Hobbs/Reporter

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The push-back against standardized testing is not limited to Texas. FairTest reports that “at least seven states” - Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Delaware, Maryland, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, have either “been forced to back off from their original high-stakes testing requirements and deadlines”. They seem certain to do so, or have already “decided to scale down their testing programs.”

It is against this background that we now turn to a sharing of the views, understandings, attitudes, insights and perspectives of a set of practicing school administrators, also doctoral graduate students who have completed coursework in educational policy development.

After several years of unbridled support for public education, the political environment has undergone a major shift that impacts educational policy negatively. There are many reasons for the diminutions of optimism surrounding expectations coupled with slogans such as:

All Children can learn;

All teachers can teach;

All schools can be effective;

All school districts can promote and deliver quality, equity, and adequacy for a diverse student population;

Education as an investment should be above politics;

The church, school, and home Partnership is a vibrant triad that enables students to be successful and schools to be effective;

While many of these slogans were positive and undergirded a political statement that implied there was a political and operational will that would result in policies and practices that would respond to externally imposed assessment expectations, the Nation has grappled with a contentious policy environment connected to a turbulent political climate that threatens the efficacy of the public discourse around standards, assessment, quality, equity, efficiency, and choice.

These societal conditions and the so-called deplorable situations facing students in many rural and urban school districts, represent a clarion call for educational leadership. Reflective teaching and learning can serve as a very valuable process for understanding and aiding in the application of knowledge, skills and conceptual frameworks. The diverse insights and perspectives of the previously referenced doctoral graduate students who have completed coursework in educational policy development illustrate the shared views, understandings, and attitudes related to how and why as well as to what extent the intersection of policy and practice is not easily discussed or situated in the levels of policy implementers.

Moreover, these challenges and opportunities can reach levels of interesting crossroads when balanced against a less than robust and inclusive economy that threatens the political will when issues of quality, equity, and adequacy as the critical triad for resources in education are set aside due to a contentious and unyielding local, state, and federal political climate. It may be time to invite the implementers to the table for policymaking input and participation. In short, in this Section of this Chapter we chronicle potential policy in education set forth by doctoral students (identified as informants) attending courses in the evenings and weekends, working during the five day week in classrooms, schools, school districts, and other related work environments, while serving as teachers, supervisors, administrators and other education related positions who must implement policies imposed in many cases without their full participation in the process. The information that follows has been organized over several years and will illustrate for the reader how policy development, reformulation, and implementation can be refined to embrace inclusivity.

Perspectives on Quality

The examples illustrated in this category are consistent with values linked to quality or excellence as expectations for children in the P-12 educational pipeline.

Informant 001, an education practitioner, responded with policy issues as follows: “It would be easy to point fingers as we try to determine where and when the breakdown in our educational system occurred. Instead of pointing fingers, we as a Nation must take a stand. Schools alone cannot close the achievement gap. Instead, we must strive to increase school-home relationships, provide better health care to mothers, and open non-biased lines of communication with all stakeholders. Education does not start when a child enters a classroom. Education starts before a child is born. There are so many factors that must be taken into consideration when we think about academic achievement. Factors such as family structure, parental involvement, exposure and availability of adequate educational resources are a few of the many factors that contribute to a quality education. Although I am appalled that African American students are at a grave disadvantage when compared with their peers, unfortunately, I am not surprised. We must acknowledge this urgent matter and do a better job of educating minority students. Our future is in danger.”

Informant 002 cited a study that addresses the importance of pedagogical skills as a precursor to quality with: “The results of the study by Holland, Hare and Holland (2007) support the assertion that there is a statistically significant difference between the achievement test scores of students who are taught by National Board Certified Teachers, compared to students who are taught by non-certified teachers. The study was limited to a small sampling of students and teachers in the state of Mississippi. While it only provided empirical evidence to accept or reject the notion that National Board Certified Teachers affect positively student achievement, it certainly addresses the policy implications for teacher quality.”

Informant 003 approached the fatherhood potentiality as a key component to parental involvement for quality as an output of the educational process with: “The lack of consideration for the African American student’s family environment and parental situation is a current ineffective practice that needs to be commonly addressed in the policies of our accountability

system. I predict that there is an evident relationship between the educational policies and the role of the father in the household. This relationship populates heavily in urban areas, however, it goes unnoticed in the accountability policies of the political system. We cannot separate the child into parts and deal with one part of him/her while at school and ignore the other situations that may have impacted the child at home or on the child's way to school. The role of the father can differentiate the tone that is set for education within the household and have a lasting effect on the family. The role of fatherhood has changed from a mere financial provider for the household to one that shares parental roles and responsibilities within the household.”

Informant 004 outlined some critical components for the policy considerations necessary for excellence in education. “Quality education equals desirable educational conditions, high educational standards for all, access to technology for all, good teaching practices that yield cultural responsiveness in turn will add up to students reaching their potential. If we as a nation continue doing the same old thing in education, we will continue to get the same results, inequitable conditions for minority students. There definitely needs to be more research in the area of the effectiveness of specific educational technology for teaching and learning. Educators must familiarize themselves with technology, utilize the technology, and integrate the technology into the classroom and daily living, thereby realigning their instruction and student outcomes with the technology.”

Perspectives on Equity

The examples illustrated in this category are consistent with values related to equity and are distinctive in meaning and action from the term equity.

Informant 005 chose to approach the issue of equity for the pre-service and in-service professional development of personnel sharing that: “Many novice teachers come into urban classrooms that are filled with students of color harboring subconscious ideas or perceptions that they have picked up from the media or even their own families and most of the ideas and perceptions are negative. Since demographic research indicates that our country and schools are being immersed with new people and new cultures, we must educate our new generation of teachers, counselors, and administrators to be culturally sensitive and aware so that they will not

come into classrooms, schools, and school districts embracing negative perceptions that lead to branding students thereby lowering academic achievement expectations. If we do not convince policy makers and implementers to respond to teaching and learning inequities, the idea of education reform will be just that, an idea and not a reality. We cannot stay in the same place philosophically and professionally and expect different or more positive results”.

Informant 006 discussed the inadequacies, ineffectiveness, and the indifference toward African Americans students and mathematics achievement: “At the 1997 Benjamin Banneker (an African American Mathematician) Association Leadership Conference, several theories were introduced as possibilities for the Africa American performance deficiency in the field of mathematics. For example, urban students look at problem solving differently. They ask questions based on real life problems and samples should be socio-cultural and relevant. Other reasons include: the unavailability of advanced math courses; mediocre teachers; low expectations of students; advanced math courses not taken prior to high school; and an endless repetition of core skills in the classroom. The relationship is not just strained because of issues in the classroom because African American youth beliefs about math often originate from their parents. Above all, what has stood out most is the overwhelming data which suggests that teacher apathy supports the student’s cavalier attitude toward math. The students are not challenged. Teachers expectation is low, so students perform poorly.”

Informant 007 provided some policy challenges for the epidemic instances of “bullying” in schools sharing that: "Education policy development and operations are dependent on school administrators, counselors, and teachers being knowledgeable about issues facing their children and community. An educator must have the ability and opportunity to work with parents, students, and community members to engage actively in policy development and implementation. They are the ones who are closest to the situation and have a great deal to lose; therefore, they should be empowered to do what needs to be done. Leadership requires vision of risk-taking and heart. Best practices regarding bulling behavior must be investigated and shared so that schools can modify policies and practices to meet the needs of their students. Finally, care must be taken to break the code of silence that exists among young people when it comes to issues such as bullying and rewards established for interpersonal behaviors that are expected.”

Informant 008 responded to the importance of the affective needs of African-American students with “The African American students need love, attention, nurturing and care. In order to close the achievement gap, administrators, teachers and counselors have to meet the deficiency needs of African American students first, before they can meet their educational needs. An administrator’s leadership style should be designed to be sensitive to the cultural and educational needs of African American students. There ought to be programs and ongoing workshops in place that will promote positive and enriching learning experiences for those students. This will put them on a level playing field with everyone. Administrators lead in a way that will encourage teachers to live by the song, and believe that the “children are our future; teach them well, and let them lead the way; show them all the beauty they possess inside; give them a sense of pride. . .”

Informant 009 described the sensitive positions that some teachers find themselves in due to testing with “Teachers do not have control over all the variables that lead to successful student performance on external tests. A large-scale test is too blunt an instrument to determine how well an individual student is learning. Focusing accountability on a state test causes teachers to narrow their curriculum to what’s on the test and ignore other legitimate learning objectives. Criteria and norm based standardized tests have become the popular method to evaluate teacher performance. Although research tells us that teacher quality has an effect on test scores, that does not mean the teacher is responsible for how a specific student performs on a standardized test. Nor does it mean we can equate effective teaching with higher test scores. Also, because teachers are evaluated by students performance, teachers ‘teach to the test’ to ensure student success and job security. Doing so has a negative effect on a student’s education. Standardized tests only give a partial view of student achievement.”

Perspectives on Adequacy

The examples illustrated in this category are consistent with values related to adequacy as the wherewithal to address quality and equity resourcefully.

Informant 010 grappled with the lack of resourcefulness of high priority schools in inner city communities, sharing that “Some teachers have difficulties and challenges not just with African American children, but all children in inner city schools. Teaching economically challenged and ethnic minority children in dilapidated, inner city schools, causes some educators to leave the profession with broken hopes and empty promises. Limited resources create varying degrees of funding ability for schools, which in turn create a culture in which competing for resources is necessary. This approach is connected to outcome-based education theories that high-expectations goals-setting will result in greater academic achievement for most students. However, these policies were created by politicians, with little or no input from teachers”.

Informant 011 spoke to the lengths that exceptional teachers will go to stimulate students through efficacious attitudes and behaviors: “Ms. Richardson (elementary school), Mr. Blanchard (middle School) and my mother visited the principal at Washington Marion High School to facilitate a minority to minority transfer to LaGrange Senior High School. It was there that Ms. Richardson introduced me to Mr. Curtis Brown. Mr. Brown introduced me to the baseball coach and received approval for me to practice only after I was able to perform academically and maintain appropriate behavior at all times. After weeks of baseball practice and study hall, I received my first report card with all A’s and one B. That support and belief enabled me to join the school’s baseball team. Had it not been for Ms. Richardson’s interventions, I might not have received a full athletic baseball scholarship from Southern University A&M in 1984 and earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics four years later.”

Informant 012 added comments about the constantly changing expectations for teachers and students: “The latest buzz words in education are not only accountability and high stakes testing, but also college readiness. College readiness is the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed without remediation in a credit bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program, according to the Educational Policy Improvement Center. However, according to the College Board in 2010, there were at least 38% of the incoming freshmen across the nation that needed to take remedial or development courses once they were admitted to a university or college campus. In

conclusion, there is too much time, energy and effort being wasted in testing that is not really doing what is designed to be done, which is to make students college ready.”

Taleb (2008) evoked a strong sentiment that lends itself to humans’ unsuccessful attempts to define or characterize potentialities of individuals and groups with “Almost everything in social life is produced by rare but sequential shocks and jumps; all the while almost everything studied about social life focuses on the normal; particularly with bell curve methods of inference that tell you close to nothing. Why? Because the bell curve ignores large deviations, cannot handle them, yet makes us confident that we have tamed uncertainty. Its nickname is GIF, Great Intellectual Fraud.”

The purpose of presenting these brief perspectives is to demonstrate the varied input factors viewed by implementers as critical policy issues. Due principally to the structural nexus of education and the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, many states have delegated their responsibilities for school improvement and accountability expectations to local school boards. While locally controlled boards have moved politics and some decision making closer to constituents, policies and effective practices are often determined by the pursuit of “silver bullet” options rather than the seasoned and learned suggestions and recommendations of those who practice the craft in the schools.

Admittedly, this recommendation might prove to be threatening for lay board members who represent a political rather than an educational agenda, the economics of public and private funding for education demands a concerted effort to achieve an output that addresses quality, equity, and adequacy. It is equally apparent that the nuances put forth by doctoral students described herein bring forth what might be a consideration that escapes casual elective officials. In a series foreword, Banks (2010) underscored the importance of the author’s warning to decision and policy makers as follows: “if they are not mediated by a deep understanding of the ways in which cultures are fluid, changing, multifaceted, contextual, and complex, it can lead to stereotypic thinking about cultures and the essentialization of the cultures of students from diverse groups.” The logic of the fallacy of the “composition of the whole” which purports that what is true about group membership can be attributed to the lack of interest and programming

for the individuals rather than the groups. This explanation set the stage for investigating two policy issues that impact both students and schools in ways that are not equitable and useful to the pursuit of enhanced academic achievement for all students.

Informant 013 investigated the impact of two policies encoded in Texas school law that suggest strongly reconsideration and reformulation of the Discipline Code and the Average Yearly Progress expectations as follows: “An examination of the Texas Code indicated that the language related to the application of disciplinary action needs to be more specific, for example, when a teacher can send a student to the principal’s office. Sec.37.002 states, in part, ‘A teacher may remove from class a student: (1) who has been documented by the teacher to repeatedly interfere with the teacher’s ability to communicate effectively with the students in the class or with the ability of the student’s classmates to learn.’ This passage is open to broad interpretation because there is no clear definition of ‘documented’, ‘repeatedly interfere’, ‘communicate effectively’ or ‘the ability of student’s classmates to learn.’ These are key points of the code that are subject to an educator’s discretion and evidence suggests that the interpretation of the language negatively affects African American male students. The same consequences apply in relation to the removal of a student (2) ‘whose behavior the teacher determines is so unruly, disruptive, or abusive that it seriously interferes with the teacher’s ability to communicate effectively with the students in the class or with the ability of the student’s classmates to learn.’”

However, the Texas findings summarized above demonstrate that the problems must be addressed at the local and state levels, where policymakers are able to examine the school disciplinary systems in their jurisdictions. This will not be easy and will likely require significant investments in state of the art information systems and intensive professional development. School districts and individual schools will have to delve into their own intensive research in examining the Texas Education Code, Chapter, 37, assess disciplinary data involving districts, schools, teachers and students and assess teacher attitudes towards African American students.

Adequate Yearly Progress is the measure by which schools, districts and states are held accountable for student performance under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The goal is to have all students, as well as individual subgroups, reach proficient levels in reading and math by

2014 as measured by performance on state tests (Education Week, 2011). Progress on those standards must be tested annually from grades 3 through 8 and once in high school and the results are then compared to prior years. Due to a new requirement from the U.S. Department of Education, prekindergarten and kindergarten campuses will be evaluated for the first time in 2011. (Texas Education Agency, 2011)

The student groups considered for AYP include African American, Hispanic, white and the economically disadvantaged. Data compiled by the TEA in the Houston, Dallas, Austin, Fort Worth, San Antonio and Beaumont school districts all demonstrated that white students outperformed African American and Hispanic students in each of the last three years. The results for African American were consistent whether the school district was predominantly African American (Beaumont), majority Hispanic (Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth) or predominantly Hispanic (San Antonio). The same trend applied whether the white student group percentage was low (2 percent in San Antonio) or significantly higher (28 percent in Austin).

Critics assert that AYP narrowly focuses on assessing English and math for African American youth. (Christopher Knaus, 2007) These critics say that federal assessments are not required for “critical thinking, art, history, biology or anything related to participating in a democratic society.” NCLB also ignores how the surrounding community, parental income and education levels and, perhaps most importantly, teacher awareness of student cultural barriers influence academic engagement for all students. “No Child Left Behind advocates for teaching to bare minimums rather than meaningfully educating African American students,” Dr.Knaus writes.”As African Americans continue to be punished for the failures of their schools, NCLB has continued a separate and unequal educational system while shifting the debate from unequal schools to how to measure such schools”. He contends that when schools do not meet AYP, they are provided additional resources to teach to the test used to determine AYP. “Thus the cycle of teaching to the test and narrowing the curriculum exacerbates conditions for which African American students (and all others attending Title 1 schools) are further pushed out of schooling.”

Because the law holds schools accountable only in reading and math, there’s growing evidence that schools are giving short-shift to other subjects such as social studies and science. (Time

Magazine, 2007) A survey of 300 school districts conducted by the Center on Education Policy found that 71 percent of school administrators acknowledged that this was the case in elementary schools.

As we travel continuously down this road of accountability for inputs and outputs of the educational process, I am reminded of my concerns set forth in a publication in the 1970's that was not distributed widely entitled, *The Formula of Success: A Schooling Manifesto*.

“Essentially, what is suggested borders on the establishment of a nurturing framework for children by recognizing and using the environments to underscore the importance of learning as a crucial activity for life. Attention is also riveted on the institutional demands that force additional expectations on children. These expectations are generated outside of the sphere of influence open to many parents of non-traditional students. In this instance, race, culture, language, custom, wealth and attitude are elements that set these students apart from their peers. The need to overcome school-induced advantages for middle class bred children by non-traditional students is well known to all that value mass education for all citizens. Ultimately, actions will have to overtake rhetoric in the quest for a quality educational experience. The legitimate educational experience will yield opportunity and equity both within and outside of the home, experiential learning, community education, institutional and life-long involvement environments. This then is the promise, as well as the challenge, inherent in the message contained on these pages. After all, education is a life-long endeavor. . . “from the womb to the tomb.” (Cummings, 1976)

In this Chapter we presented a discussion of a salient dimension of the external environment in which today's' educators find themselves practicing – the policy context. Critical elements of this discussion included a truncated history of the encroachment on local control of the schools and the ensuing accountability and standardized testing movement. We also focused, to some extent, to growing efforts to push back against these movements. We concluded this Chapter with perspectives of a set of scholarly informants on quality, equity, and adequacy.

Evoked school experiences of former students' comprise a second boundary and are presented in Chapter Two. Awareness of the presented experience of others is critical to our understanding of the context in which children and youth are schooled as it may lead to a better understanding of what happens to students who receive schooling in the "accountability" environment in which today's schools are caused to operate. The beliefs, values, attitudes and paradigms reported in Chapter Two are also critical because the students as stakeholders eventually became parents, administrators, business leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, and teachers.

The shared insights of the former students in our available sample with respect to how they were treated in school environments, extents to which their treatment benefited from and were enhanced by "accountability" and state standards, and extents to which the schooling received adequately prepared them for real life would all seem to be critical to understanding the various inputs and processes that resulted in the need to reconstruct schools such as the Willie Ray Smith, Sr. Science and Medical Technology Magnet Middle School.

