

## **Preamble**

We are a nation facing major crises. For the better part of the last generation, our systems of education have been unable to meet the needs of too many students. As a nation, we also now find ourselves in unprecedented economic turmoil. We simply cannot afford to squander the opportunity that the current crisis presents to stimulate our economic markets and fundamentally redesign our pre-K through grade 16 education systems. Doing so can allow us to live up to our obligation to provide opportunities to every child, regardless of their zip code, while meaningfully responding to the economic needs of the nation.

We are a group of leaders from business, education, and government who collectively represent people who are concerned with our nation's future and the future of the youth of this country.

We believe that the current education system is doing what it was designed to do, but the world has changed and it is imperative that the American education system changes too. Every student must be well-educated. We call upon President Obama to use his power to lead and resource a fifty state transformation of our school system to assure the future of our youth and the future of our country.

Though we come from different backgrounds and bring different perspectives, we have reached broad agreement on the following statements which provide pathways to transforming our schools. Supported by substantial research and practice, we believe the broad base represented by this group, coupled with the new visionary and aggressive leadership represented by President Obama; provide an opportunity to make significant progress on behalf of the youth of our nation.

### **A. Assure readiness**

Success in the classroom requires that children arrive ready to learn – cognitively, physically, and psychologically everyday throughout their school years. While efforts have been made to increase learning supports from early childhood through high school, commitment and progress has been uneven across the states. There are large funding disparities within and between states that translate into dramatic differences in children's opportunities to learn. To have a major impact on public education, the Obama administration should take actions that ensure that all students have access to high quality learning environments and support systems regardless of where their schools are located.

Along with ensuring children are ready to learn cognitively, we must also ensure that they are ready to learn physically and psychologically. Although one out of five children in the United States are poor, thus far school reform initiatives have largely ignored the non-academic needs of poor children—health, nutrition, housing, transportation, child

care, etc. Studies have shown that these unmet needs invariably have an impact upon the ability of children to learn in school.

To ensure that children come to school every day ready to learn, we recommend that the Obama administration take the following action.

- Expand access to early childhood, pre-school, healthcare, and after-school programs for poor children – including helping schools to provide such services in communities where no other agencies have stepped up to the plate – in order to expand the opportunity to learn and to address some of the non-academic needs that impact learning.
- Increase parent involvement via parent training, outreach, and advisories.
- Increase funding to high poverty areas to ensure adequate access to early childhood, basic and enrichment services.
- Increase incentives for coordination with community providers and leaders.

## **B. Provide rich learning environments for all students**

We believe that all young people in America deserve rich learning environments that challenge their thinking, promote learning by doing, and focus on higher-order thinking skills that encourage life-long learning and prepare young people to be engaged, collaborative citizens.

Today, however, our public schools are characterized by profound disparities in quality and resources and we consistently spend more money to educate affluent children than poor children. As a result, for the poorest children in America, the norm continues to be narrow curricula that rarely promote higher order thinking skills. Instruction for all children, regardless of zip code, must include opportunities for mastery in academic areas along with the arts, technology, and problem solving in a global environment. While No Child Left Behind legislation has helped to identify underperforming schools and school districts, little has been done to improve these environments or after-school or community-based programs. Until we make the learning process rich for all children, we cannot begin to address the inequities inherent in our education system.

We recommend that the Obama administration make addressing education inequities a top administration priority by taking the following actions.

- Fund research that demonstrates what 21<sup>st</sup> century standards-based achievement looks like; incubate new and promising ideas; taken proven ideas to scale in the name of equity for all kids.
- Provide the state and local capacity to transform those schools that do not achieve using rewards and supports, and sanctions where appropriate.
- Use research results to mitigate inequities in which the poorest children receive the least educational resources.

- Provide necessary funding to ensure consistent teacher quality throughout a school and across schools and school districts, with special attention given to high-poverty areas.
- Create incentives to support school districts' efforts to work with community partners to expand after-school learning opportunities.

### **C. Transform standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment**

High quality, age-appropriate standards are the heart of the system. We need to develop curriculum, instruction, and assessment based on those standards. Standards should be more common, more rigorous, and benchmarked against the top international standards. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be aligned with each other and with those international benchmarked standards.

Under NCLB, schools have been preoccupied with teaching basic skills – such as math and reading – that can be assessed on standardized tests, and student performance on these tests has served as the basis for how schools are judged. In their desire to raise test scores, too many schools have limited access to subjects not covered on the tests, including science, social studies, art and music, social skills, leadership training, and character development. As President Obama observed during his campaign, teaching to the test has become a pervasive and harmful phenomenon. This is especially true in schools serving poor children. But the distortion of the curriculum has occurred in many schools serving middle class children as well.

To transform our assessment system, we recommend that the Obama administration take the following actions.

- Cull the best research and initiate new research where necessary to develop and implement assessment systems that utilize both formative and summative assessments.
- Focus assessment systems on all students on the assessment of higher order thinking skills in addition to content knowledge.
- Revise NCLB to utilize best practice system assessment processes.

### **D. Improve overall teacher quality**

We believe our nation's teachers, including early childhood and extended learning educators, are to be praised for playing a vital role in developing the intellectual capacity and curiosity of our children. Yet there is a wide variance in teacher quality, not only from school system to school system across the nation, but even from school to school in the same system, and classroom to classroom within the same school. As well, a variety of funding, hiring, and seniority transfer policies often result in poorer students getting the poorer teachers, contributing to lower performance and higher drop-out rates.

There is little disagreement that great teachers should be rewarded and poor teachers replaced. However, we believe that policies and systems must be in place to 1) support teachers' learning before they enter and at every stage of their career, 2) promote best practices in teaching, 3) reward high performers, and 4) provide opportunities for feedback and development for those who need improvement. At the same time, we must have policies and incentives that allow accomplished teachers to be spread across stronger and weaker schools.

To improve overall teacher quality, we recommend the following actions for consideration by the Obama administration.

- Promote a culture of respect for the teaching profession that attracts high achieving high school and college graduates and second career individuals, engages them in rigorous and relevant preparation, designs – in partnership with teachers – career development systems that will pay over \$100,000 for accomplished practitioners, and assures all teachers high quality workplaces.
- In exchange for this new culture of respect for our teachers, every child will be guaranteed a high-performing teacher by instituting rigorous and timely performance evaluations, tenure, and fair employment and dismissal procedures that ensure low-performing and mediocre teachers have a fair and intentional process to support their development and improvement, as well as their transition out of the system if they do not rise to a level of high performance.
- Fund best practice research to develop and implement high quality teacher recruitment, preparation, and performance assessment systems.
- Provide additional funding and incentives that improve compensation and teaching and learning conditions in high-poverty schools and encourage high-performing teachers to work in hard-to-staff positions.
- Create opportunities to train and support after-school educators and link after-school programs to the pre-k-12 system.

## **E. Ensure the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century school leaders**

21<sup>st</sup> century school systems demand 21<sup>st</sup> century school leaders. This requires support and development of school board members, superintendents, central office administrators, building principals, and teachers. Evidence shows that high quality instructional leadership improves student and school performance. Therefore school leadership should be focused on a combination of student learning, progress, and culture building, while enhancing the quality of teaching.

Leadership capacity development can be accelerated by creating and sustaining cross-school learning communities within and between districts.

Without a doubt learning comes first. However leaders must also build leadership teams while addressing complex social issues. This vision means that school leaders today

have to be more outward facing than ever before, willing to provide extended school services, working cooperatively with social services, health care professionals and the local community. It requires school leaders to be collaborative with other schools and agencies as well as focused on the internal performance of the school.

To ensure the development of 21st century school leaders, we recommend the following actions.

- Support future generation of school leaders by developing a WestPoint-like academy model for preparing outstanding educational leaders at the classroom, school, and district levels.
- Provide career long development for school leaders and high quality training in areas such as how to use data to drive action-oriented conversations; how to observe for best practice; how to create a continuous improvement culture; and how to engage community and build partnerships.
- Develop more distributed leadership to enhance performance and to share the load. While the principal's role should remain strong in strategic leadership, with increased responsibilities and accountabilities leaders must share the work with other professionals within the school and, in some cases, across schools.
- Spread best-practices, build leadership capacity, and create new norms across schools through district- and region-wide "networking" of schools. "Scaling-up" will require comprehensive, system-wide approaches to professional development focused on current and future leadership development.
- Actively pursue and develop potential leaders who demonstrate successful instructional ability and leadership potential from within and beyond the education community

## **F. Generate and Use Research Effectively**

Educational research has explored various dimensions of the teaching/learning process and strategies that promote educational excellence and equity. Research has also examined issues related to educational inequities in financing, teacher distribution, and the discordance between mandates and the resources to carry them out. Despite work carried out in these domains, several challenges characterize the field of educational research.

First, given contemporary changes in demography, technology, and in the speed with which information is generated and transmitted, there is need to create new knowledge that is current and relevant to contemporary and future contexts. Indeed, old paradigms must give way to new and more relevant research studies. Moreover, investments in educational research pale by comparison to investments in other domains including health and welfare. Second, beyond increasing the quantity of educational research, its quality must also be rigorously advanced. The latest instruments, methods, and

approaches to the research enterprise, including peer review, must be supported to advance the highest ethical and quality research standards. Third, conventionally under-addressed areas of research should be mounted, including research on English language learners, children with disabilities, and at-risk populations. Fourth, often the development of research is haphazard, with little focus on the development of a sustained program or system of research.

Beyond concerns with the quantity and quality of research produced, attention must be accorded the use of data that emanates from evaluation studies, longitudinal data sets, empirical analyses, and field initiated studies. Too often, research remains removed from the realities of educational practice, either being too esoterically conceptualized or producing results of limited relevance. Educational research needs to focus on solution-oriented data that address real-world challenges. Such research should emanate from a coordinated strategy to advance innovation through a serious and sustained commitment to advancing an integrated research, development, and dissemination strategy. In considering the generation and use of research, we must remain cognizant of the need to advance international research and the use of international data in developing solutions to contemporary challenges. Finally, there is a need to support states as they develop user-friendly data bases that can help inform policy and practice

However robust that data base, to have impact, it must be continuously enriched and it must be used to make improvements in educational pedagogy, practice, and policy.

To that end, we recommend that the Obama administration supports the following:

- The continuation of national data collection, including the use of NAEP data;
- Increased fiscal support for the educational research enterprise;
- The advancement of new research trajectories and topics that address specific 21st century and international challenges;
- The promulgation of a rich research, demonstration, and dissemination strategy;
- The advancement of strategies to assure that all funded research is conceptualized with specific applications in mind; such research should end with recommendations for practice and policy;
- Linkages with other research institutions (e.g., NIMH, NIH, HHS) to embark on collaborative research;
- Support for the chronicling and dissemination of all research, using the most innovative technological tools; and
- Promote efforts to reduce the technological, legal, and leadership barriers to building and using integrated data systems.