

The Business Council of New York State

Education Policy

Introduction

In 1950, 60 percent of jobs for new workers were classified as unskilled, compared to just 15% today. Workers will need skills and knowledge in tomorrow's high-tech, information-driven, global marketplaces that were considered unnecessary only a generation ago.

New York State schools must compete on a global level and close the gap between our students and students of other countries. According to the Third International Math and Science Study (2000), at the fourth grade level in math and science, our kids are among the best in the world. By the 8th grade, we rank 28th. By the 12th grade, we trail every developed nation in the world. Even our very best students can't compete with their counterparts around the world: our top kids are last among 16 countries that test physics and math.

In the past few decades, student achievement in New York State has remained rather flat. This is not acceptable in a world of global competition and rapid advances in technology. That is why business is so passionate about ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed. School systems must adopt higher standards, use high-quality assessments aligned to these standards, hold schools accountable for results and provide a support system to help students and teachers reach those standards.

Our schools don't have to do this on their own. Business has a contribution to make. While we are not expert in teaching, we do have experience in leading complex, large enterprises. We know data is critical to the continuing success of our companies. Using data to align strategy is a skill that business can help transfer to the education system. We can contribute expertise on various business practices critical to the overall operation of schools, such as payroll, accounting, procurement or transportation. We can also help to keep the focus on improving student achievement.

We can contribute resources. Every community across New York State has abundant skill and talent in its business community. More than money, business can give human capital to help our students, teachers, and administrators master the operational side of education.

Most importantly, we can contribute our desire for the success of young people. We need high skill levels in our workers, but we don't expect schools to simply churn out "worker bees." We know education is critical for young people to become mature adults, caring family members, and effective citizens.

The future quality of life for everyone in New York State depends on the quality of education our children receive today. Getting the education and skills that prepare students for lifelong learning is the first step towards getting good jobs that pay decent wages and make the other goals attainable.

Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Overall Position

We support standards, assessment and accountability as essential to school improvement and one without the others is meaningless. Simply put – what gets measured gets done.

Standards

We Support:

- the maintenance of challenging learning standards. The current standards are an excellent starting point. They should be continuously reviewed and aligned to changes in the environment.

Discussion

There is a long history establishing the need for higher standards in education. In 1983, a report called “A Nation-at-Risk” called for higher standards for students across the country.

In the late 1980’s technology was increasing the need for higher skilled workers. The Board of Regents established a committee to evaluate whether students were adequately prepared for the workforce. The committee determined that the high school diploma of the time did not reflect high enough skills for success in the workplace.

The New York Board of Regents has articulated 28 learning standards which were developed over a number of years with input from teachers, parents, educators and employers. These standards are the cornerstone of a quality education system. The need for them has been confirmed repeatedly by every thorough examination of the topic for over two decades.

Assessment

We Support:

- assessment as key to knowing whether students have met the state standards.
- the Regents Exams; they are a good foundation as the measure to be used to determine that students have met the standards. They should be continuously reviewed and improved.
- Ensuring that annual tests are uniform statewide and yield comparable data on student achievement from grade to grade and over time.
- strategies to keep young people in school and prevent dropout.
- alignment of major components of the education systems toward a common goal of increasing the academic achievement of all students in the state.

Discussion

Demonstrating student mastery of high standards requires testing. Testing is essential for any system of assessment to be persuasive in its integrity to parents, employers and the public. Without common standards and a reliable, valid and fair measure of academic achievement, there is chaos and subjectivity with regard to what students have learned.

Assessments are essential to determine not just how well students are learning, but also how well the system is performing. Testing is the diagnostic tool that can locate strengths and weaknesses in the system and help to determine how to allocate resources and provide the right services. Test results should be used to inform and improve instruction, not as a punishment.

Some states, including New York, have faced a backlash to annual testing based on opposition to “high stakes” use of tests. A common criticism is that standards and testing stifle creativity in teaching and learning. However, standards and tests measure the core knowledge and skills that all students need to learn to become productive adults. They do not dictate how the learning

standards should be taught. No teacher needs to “teach to the test” – they need only to teach to the learning standards. Teaching to the test is a poor teaching strategy that may be the last resort for some teachers not well versed in their subject matter and/or with weak teaching skills.

Standards and measures bring a higher level of quality education to all. Prior to standards-based reform and accountability those who had little learned little. Children in wealthier communities traditionally have had a higher quality education. Regular assessments can identify substandard achievement while it can still be fixed. Without the standards and tests, students can easily fall behind, making it harder for them at the next level. Lack of standards and tests make it easy to pass students along without the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.

Another criticism is that some students know the material but can’t demonstrate what they know on regular tests. There is no research to support that view. What research data does show is that students, who go to class, make an effort to learn, and have a strong curriculum and teachers who know and can communicate their subject matter, pass state tests. Learning test taking skills can have life long benefits. Students will encounter tests throughout their lives and careers.

Typically, tests do not set the bar too high. A recent study of six states’ high school exit exams by Achieve indicates that the tests typically measure skills that students are usually taught in middle school or the first year of high school. The study looked at tests in mathematics and English and language arts given in six states: Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas. Also, a study conducted by the Princeton Review in 2002 covering all states found that New York State had the third best testing program in the country.

A recent report from the Center for Education Policy documents that high school exit exams have led schools to raise the bar, encouraging them to cover more of the content in state standards, align curriculum with state standards, and add remedial and other special courses for students at risk of failing.

That report also notes that there is a “moderate amount of evidence” suggesting these exams may be associated with higher dropout rates. Whether there is a connection or it is due to other factors, our dropout rate is of deep concern. We must keep young people in school.

We believe however that any sound testing system itself should be subject to review, refinement and adjustment. SED has withdrawn exams which have been shown to be flawed, and we support such actions. We must continually improve and adjust testing so that it is fair, rigorous and a meaningful measure of quality learning.

Finally, business supports aligning the major components and activities of the education systems toward a common goal of increasing the academic achievement of all students in the state. Alignment is necessary for consistency, sound diagnosis, quality control, and accountability.

Accountability

We Support:

- accountability through the annual publication of student achievement data, by both school and by district, in easily understood formats that allow comparison of each local school with others in the district and state.
- disaggregating achievement data for each major demographic group of students.
- keeping state-defined levels of ‘proficiency’ for meeting adequate yearly progress on track to be at 100% after 12 years.

- rewards for high leader and teacher performance, a system to help leaders and teachers who need improvement, and clear, enforceable consequences for persistent low performance.
- dealing immediately with schools already identified as needing improvement under Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994.
- making State accountability systems fully implemented and operational before the 2004-2005 school year, as required by law.
- Using results to commit to an aggressive action plan to turn around the results – no exceptions, no excuses -- not to point fingers and criticize educators.

Discussion

Once high standards are set, and testing is in place to measure performance, there must be accountability for results. Persistent poor results should be dealt with aggressively and with consequences for the adults. New York State has much of this system in place, and we support its continuation and improvement.

For accountability to operate effectively, the public, particularly parents, must know how schools are performing. The New York State accountability system is data driven through state testing in the 4th and 8th grades and the Regents Exams. New York was one of the first states in the nation to provide school-by-school report cards. New York provides all of the currently required information in district and building school report cards.

New York State also has a program to deal with failing schools, called Schools Under Registration Review (SURR), that has been continuously improved upon since the mid-1980s. Additional schools have been identified as in need of improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). All these schools are subject to NCLB sanctions if they do not improve.

Each state is required to have an accountability system that is based on increasing student achievement. The state defines what level of achievement constitutes ‘proficiency’ in academic standards. New York has initially set these levels appropriately and must continue to advance the levels at a rate that will meet the 12 year goal.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

We Support:

- NCLB in its broad purposes and structure; it attempts to align the efforts of federal, state and local education organizations toward accountability and measurable outcomes.
- continually reviewing and improving NCLB, based on the demonstrated results on educational achievement.

The specific measures in the law are addressed under the subject matter areas, and we believe that some provisions should be modified. However, these do not overshadow the fact that NCLB gives us for the first time a national framework for standards and data that must be maintained.

Discussion

In January 2002, the President and Congress agreed to the most sweeping reform of federal education law in many years. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) builds on the work started in the states and provides new accountability measures and resources to help raise the achievement of students nationwide.

There is considerable flexibility left to states as to how to implement NCLB. New York has already met many of the requirements; we need to continue to keep the focus on improvement.

Teachers and Professional Development

We Support:

- more professional development opportunities for teachers .
- committing a substantial portion of professional development money to improve math and science teaching.
- recruiting and retaining qualified individuals in the classroom. The State should undertake an aggressive and innovative agenda to make the teaching profession more attractive.
- taking advantage of ‘second career’ programs and focusing on key student development areas.
- discontinuing the granting of generic K-8 teaching licenses and working with higher education institutions to develop licensing programs that align more directly with grade-related specific subject-matter areas.
- urging the State to support the process for teachers to obtain their National Board Certification (NBC).

Discussion

Study after study shows that teachers make the critical difference in whether or not a student succeeds. . If students are to meet ambitious expectations, they must have superbly prepared teachers equal to the task.

For business, investment in workforce quality through upgrade training is an increasingly important issue. Education is no different. There must be increased opportunities for professional development.

States receive funding for professional development of teachers, with special attention on improving math and science teaching and integrating technology in education. States can use funds for teacher recruitment, hiring, performance pay, alternative routes to certification, knowledge development, and advanced certification. These efforts should be focused in high need areas, particularly math and science, as shortages in these areas are growing

Many teachers are teaching subjects not in their field, and out-of-field teachers are disproportionately found in low-income schools. NCLB requires that states ensure that all teachers in core subjects are “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

Recruitment strategies must be changed. These changes should include looking at alternative-route candidates through such programs as Teachers of Tomorrow and Troops to Teachers campaigns, to name two of those offered in New York State.

The State should focus recruitment strategies on key student development areas: languages other than English, technology education, sciences, career and technical education, math, bilingual and school media subjects. These areas are listed as New York State teacher shortage areas. All this is made more urgent by the prospective retirement of a large percentage of current teachers.

The State should support the process for teachers to obtain their National Board Certification (NBC). This intense program of study is often initiated by the teacher without support from

district leaders or building principals. It prepares teachers for leadership among peers and excellence in the classroom.

Leadership

We Support:

- focusing on the ability of education and school management to affect change in the systems and to allocate resources effectively. Instructional and teaching skill sets are unique to education. However, school leadership must also carry leadership skill sets that are transferable from business to education, such as change leadership, data analysis, and managing to outcomes.
- a system of rewards and incentives.
- streamlining procedures for dismissing incompetent teachers and administrators.

Discussion

The education system is very large and complex, and it faces a need for great change. In recent years business has also faced such pressure to change; the complexity and pace of change has never been greater. Leadership and the skills of employees are critical factors in successful change, and we should expect nothing different in education. Investing in the leaders and professionals of the education system is critical to helping effect necessary changes.

Leaders are critical to change in the system. A recent report by the Education Research Service cites studies that find that one attribute of all high performing schools is a dedicated and dynamic principal. Superintendents and senior officials must galvanize commitment to standards and assessment, and principals must be the academic leaders in their buildings.

Business has a unique contribution to make in helping the school system identify and acquire these management skills. We have experience with these transformations and can advise educators in achieving successful change. Business has developed a culture and expertise around managing to results, using data effectively; focusing on outcomes, managing change and other skills that education leaders will need to master the new environment.

In Pathfinder Award winning schools, principals exhibit an unrelenting belief in their students' ability to learn, they support their teachers by providing the staff development they need to help their students reach higher levels, they use data to inform where they needed to make changes, and they foster cross grade-level communication to align curriculum and expectations for what would be accomplished at each level. They never blame the students or their families for any short comings, and they seek out and value parent involvement.

The New York City Leadership Academy and The School Leadership Program are two examples of programs where successful business leaders engage with education leaders using the most effective business leadership models to create a strong focus on instruction. Such programs are geared towards management development systems that ensure performance of their current and future leaders.

In the 1990s, school leaders focused on how to improve literacy and numeracy at the elementary level, where the principal is the key player in leading reform and improving student performance. Some school districts have embraced the development and support of the school principal as instructional leader. Despite these good beginnings, the principal as instructional leader is too

narrow a concept to carry the weight of the reforms that we need for the future. We need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools.

Articles from Principal Leadership magazine, comparing leaders from successful educational organizations with those from successful businesses, found business leaders have an advantage in developing and sharing knowledge and setting expectations for excellence.

Education Funding

We Support:

- an investment in education that is effective and adequate to ensure a well educated workforce for a successful future. However, more money for education will not improve student achievement unless we maintain the framework of standards and accountability and better prepare teachers and school leaders.
- finding the best investments possible that will have the most measurable impact on student achievement, rather than debating what the total investment should be over unmanageable timeframes such as five years.
- obtaining the resources for education from growth; tax increases will ultimately lessen the amount available to spend on education rather than increase it
- simplifying the formulae for distributing State aid and decreasing the differentials in funding distribution.
- reducing education mandates and giving educators more flexibility in how to spend resources.

Discussion

While it needs to be understood, a focus on funding alone has historically not been shown to result in school improvement. Having standards and accountability are the keys to making spending effective.

Discussions of state aid and the recent Court of Appeals decision on school funding can easily side-track conversations about school improvement. We support a business approach to addressing this question. Investments should be assessed for their impact on student achievement, based on the best available data, and the resources available should be applied to these areas.

New York State now spends more per student (approximately \$11,000) than any other state in the nation. That figure is almost \$4,000 higher than the national average of \$7,284. New York State's spending per pupil is 8.8% higher than in 2000; the average increase nationally was 6.6%.

However, due to differentials in state aid and local effort and ability to pay, expenditures vary dramatically from the highest spending school districts to the lowest school districts. New York is also a high cost state. Funding methods should bring more balance to this distribution.

State school aid is distributed through 50 plus funding formulae. Distribution is based on number of pupils, expenses and direct grants to schools and districts. Factors include school district wealth pupil needs, spending and tax effort. The complexity of these formulae frustrates public understanding of the issue. They should be drastically simplified.

Much of the funding is restricted in its use. Education leaders would like more flexibility in spending, while many interest groups lobby to have what they want supported by distinct funding streams.

These categorical streams are a bar to effective management of the schools and should be reduced so that education managers have the flexibility to pursue strategies of school reform. This flexibility is a necessary element to a fair accountability system.

The Court of Appeals decision may exacerbate the pressure to increase taxes. However, combined local and state business taxes in New York are among the highest in the country. The business share of state taxes is \$10.6 billion – or over 25 percent. Business' share of local property taxes for schools is \$6.6 billion; added to business' share of state taxes that go to local schools, the total business contribution to education alone is almost \$10.1 billion.

Business supports well placed investment to achieve the changes in the education system we have outlined. However, economic growth should fuel the amount of dollars available for education. Tax increases will ultimately lessen the resources available for education by driving employers and families out of the state.