

The Little Hoover Commission  
Remarks by Delaine Eastin, former Superintendent of Public Instruction  
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Thank you for the opportunity to share my reflections on governance in California education today. To begin by stating the obvious: the global economy has fundamentally changed the importance of education. Once upon a time, all you needed was a strong back and a willingness to work hard if you wanted to get ahead.

The information age and globalization have not only raised the educational requirements for success in an individual's career, they have raised the educational requirements for successful states and successful nations. This may not be as apparent in the short run, but will become very apparent in the longer term.

If you have not read The World is Flat by Thomas Friedman, you should. The book is interesting and it is sobering. It is one of the best books on Globalization that I have read. Friedman describes trends in the world economy that make education more important than ever before. He says, "Young Chinese, Indians and Poles are not racing to the bottom. They are racing us to the top. They do not want to work for us; they don't even want to be us. They want to dominate us—in the sense that they want to be creating the companies of the future that people all over the world will admire and clamor to work for." (p. 265)

And he points out, a great many of the jobs going overseas today are very high-end jobs, because not only are the employees abroad cheaper to hire, a great many are as educated as Americans...or even more so.

I hope you realize that 60 percent of the nation's top scientists and 65 percent of the top mathematics are children of recent immigrants?

Every four years the United States takes part in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (the TMSS study). What high performing countries do in their educational systems is most important for us to

understand. What happens in those extraordinarily high achieving countries that are in diverse locations, including the Netherlands and Singapore?

What the study found in high performing countries was coherence. Singapore is one of the most fascinating examples of this coherence because the education transformation that occurred there happened in a generation.

The importance of coherence cannot be overemphasized.

In high performing countries there are:

1. Clear, high standards,
2. Matching fair assessments,
3. Curriculum frameworks based on standards,
4. Instructional materials aligned to those frameworks,
5. Aligned instruction,
6. Safety nets to assist children with special needs,
7. Teachers are valued and their training and professional development all support coherence
8. A leader (at a school, the principal, and in a district, the superintendent) who leads for results and aligns all
9. Preschool for all
10. A comprehensive plan to provide postsecondary training to its students.

When we talk about world-class standards, we are talking about content AND performance standards. The highest performing nations emphasize using information, not memorization. Multiple-choice exams do not effectively measure performance, but demonstrated ability to write, analyze, think critically, identify defects and work in groups does.

A majority of the current State Board of Education and a majority of the State Board under the last two governors has been obsessed, not with curriculums and assessments that encourage critical thinking and performance skills, but with narrow drill and kill curriculums with old-fashioned workbooks and multiple choice formats. High-achieving countries use exams that require student to conduct research and do scientific investigations.

Moreover, we still do not have performance standards in California. Our current standards are content only and when the world changes, the State Board has no means to update even the content standards.

Thus the events of 9/11 are not in our current standards. In science, if a new element were discovered for the periodic table, we could not add it. In a world in which information is doubling every 2 years the failure to develop performance standards or to be able to update content standards is ridiculous.

We must look forward, not only to better writing and speaking, but also to real lessons in science and social science, the arts, and physical education. We need hands-on learning and field trips to places that will capture the imaginations of our children. Too many children do not know why they have to learn the material. Because science and social science are tested in only two grades, there are schools in this state that only teach those subjects in those two grades. That is a fact. A disgraceful fact, but a fact nonetheless.

In the highest performing states and countries, teachers feel valued. These teachers report they have adequate resources and support to be effective. The highest performing nations have a low turnover of teachers. In fact the Rand Corporation found that in high performing states in America, teachers feel valued and there is low turnover. In high performing states, teachers tell us they have sufficient resources. Overall in America we are losing one-third of our teachers every five years.

In high performing countries, states and districts teachers have time to meet and confer, to collaboratively plan, observe and analyze classroom lessons. There is time for cross-site learning and for what Cuban and Tyack recognized as the power of “inside-out” reforms, which are led from within a school rather than pushed into it from outside. In Japan, Japanese lesson study, a time for teachers to observe each other, is one of their most powerful educational innovations.

Teachers need principals that are instructional leaders who feel empowered to create a vision and develop strategies for achieving high standards. Principals need to build organizational systems in which everyone at the school site takes ownership.

As state Superintendent of Public Instruction, I visited over 500 schools in every county of the state of California. I never went to a great school that did not have a great principal. (I never went to a great district that did not have a great superintendent, either.) So today I want to talk to you about great educational leadership and how we foster it.

Too often, in America, principals do not have, or feel they do not have, control.

Highly effective principals, like leaders in the military and in the most successful businesses, are leaders that have authority as well as responsibility. Great principals are managers and leaders who feel in control.

Today, both the federal and the state accountability systems hold principals responsible for student outcomes. Yet, principals frequently report they do not feel empowered to make the changes required to get their schools to high standards.

The challenges confronting principals and school leaders include:

- >Lack of adequate financial resources,
- >Low expectations for students,
- >Limited faculty capacity,
- >Lack of authority to get the job done,
- >And no time to be an instructional leader.

We need a strategy for developing the kind of coherence that is found in high performing countries. Coherence does not mean the state or the district micromanages school operations.

We need a strategy for developing a new generation of school leaders along the lines found in high performing military units and private sector enterprises.

We need the kind of capacity building model found in successful educational systems in other states, like Connecticut, and in other countries, like Singapore. The state now has outcome measurements, why then are we micromanaging inputs? We should not be telling districts which textbooks to use; we should be stressing the need to get students to high standards PERIOD. Even worse than telling districts what textbooks to use is the

speed with which new adoptions are being made. Good for the textbook publishers but bad for schools and children. But even the publishers complain loudly about how prescriptive our adoption process is. Get rid of it. Only 22 states tell their schools what books to use. California should drop out of that group.

We need the time to make leadership reforms work. And we need the resources that will allow school reforms to continue moving in the right direction. The roller coaster of funding must end. Schools should not have a myriad of categorical programs to administer. Get rid of all but a handful of categorical programs, keeping only a few, like special education. I recommend using a weighted student funding formula similar to that found in the Netherlands. And we need to allow the money to follow the student into the classroom.

The state desperately needs a student information system. I first called for one when I was in the legislature in 1991. Why don't we have one? Lack of political will. No one wants to be Governor the day it goes on line and everyone is forced to face a more than 30% dropout rate statewide and a 50% dropout rate in our cities. A lot of lip service is paid to the failure to pass the high school exit exams, but four times as many students drop out before they fail the test, as fail the test. Once again, the rollout of this system has been delayed. No corporation spending over \$40 Billion would do so without a database that tracked the customers, services and/or the products. No matter where the point of accountability is, the failure to have accurate data, lets people duck responsibility.

Leadership matters, as every great enterprise knows. A failure to recruit and retain of school principals and district superintendents, who understand and can build coherent systems for learning new skills required in the global economy, will mean a failure for America, for as California goes so goes the nation.

In a remarkably short period of time, Singapore reinvented its educational system to become the highest achieving nation on earth, according to the TMSS study. We think that can happen here, but only with great leadership.

The defense of America has more to do with the education of our children than the building of an anti-missile system or putting a person on Mars or a war in Iraq. The defense of this country is now, and has always been, about

having a well-educated population that dreams of a better life for themselves and, perhaps most of all for their children. Every major country with which we compete has universal preschool. So do states like Georgia, Oklahoma and Florida. Illinois and New York are on the way. In California we are too timid to have made such a commitment. Shameful really, knowing what we know about how children learn. The steepest learning curve is from birth to age 5.

Unlike in my childhood, today in America, most low wage workers never move into the middle class. According to a study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the economies of France, Italy, Britain, Germany, Denmark, Finland and Sweden provide more mobility for low-wage workers than the United States. The education system is the primary reason that low-income children remained mired in poverty. It is un-American from where I sit.

Our only hope for social competence and for economic success and for the prevalence of democratic values is to improve the education of our children—all of our children. And let us increase the number of students who attend college or who are well prepared for other post-secondary careers in culinary arts, or medical technology or whatever dreams they may dream.

In addition to our sorry performance in Pre-Kindergarten through the twelfth grade, federal and state support for higher education has dropped precipitously even as tuition is soaring. Students that are able to attend colleges and universities are leaving with the biggest debt load in history. Ironically back in the 1960's and 1970's when college was not essential to a middle-class lifestyle, our government was much more generous in helping students to attend college. Pell grants have been stagnant for years and at the state level, per-pupil spending for higher education is at a 25-year low.

Neil Postman wrote, "Children are the message we send to a time we will never see." Our ill-schooled forbears, seemed to understand this. They were generous and visionary with the future.

I sincerely hope that our generation will begin to plan for a future that Friedman describes when he says, "In the flat world the frontiers of knowledge get pushed out farther and farther, faster and faster.... And America either needs to be training that brainpower itself or importing it from somewhere else—or ideally both—if it wants to dominate the twenty-

first century the way it dominated the twentieth—and that simply is not happening.” One of the most frightening aspects of American life is not just our weak support for universal preschool and world class elementary and secondary education, but also our increasing timidity and lack of vision when it comes to supporting higher education. Why are we making it so much more difficult for students to attend college when a college education is more important than ever?

Put somewhat differently, Susan B. Anthony once observed, “Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, can never bring about a reform.”

I sincerely hope that we, as a nation, can move ahead more boldly when it comes to the education of our children and our adults. I am sorry to report that I think we lack the courage, the vision and the heart of our ancestors. Unlike our ancestors, we have dozens of studies that tell us what to do. The Master Plan for Education was a multi-million dollar endeavor that is now gathering dust. The current Governor and the current Superintendent have councils discussing what to do. We have some of the finest public and private research institutions in the world with suggestions for what to do. We have studied this system to death and could fill this auditorium with studies that echo very similar themes. What we lack is the political will to do the things we know we should do.

Recently Bob Herbert wrote in the New York Times, “This is a wonderful example of extreme stupidity. American will pony up a trillion or two for a president who goes to war on a whim, but can’t find the money to adequately educate its young. History has shown that these kinds of destructive trade-offs are early clues to a society in decline.”

In July of 1862, during the darkest days of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln had good reason to limit funding for things like education. Instead, he signed the Morrill Act creating the Land Grant College System. The stated intent was to assist members of the working classes to obtain a liberal, practical education. Every state in our union has at least one land-grant college—there are a total of 181 such institutions in our country. Millions have students have been educated in these institutions. Lincoln had no research telling him what to do.

In the immediate aftermath of the War Between the States, while America was reeling from the costs and losses in the Civil War, we did not hunker down and say, “We cannot afford things like investing in education.” Instead America became one of the first countries on earth to invest in compulsory public education. State by state, we began educating all of our people. And America prospered because of those brave choices.

In 1944, in the midst of the greatest conflict our nation have ever faced, our leaders did not say, “Tisk, tisk, we are at war, and therefore must cut spending on education.” Instead, Franklin Roosevelt signed the GI Bill of Rights, designed to provide greater opportunities for returning war veterans. The bill provided federal aid to help veterans, especially in the area of education. It alone is estimated to have doubled the college population. More than 2 million students attended colleges and universities because of the GI Bill or Rights. It is estimated than over 230,000 became teachers.

Under President Eisenhower, the promotion of education and the protection of children continued to be treated as a matter of national defense. After Sputnik was launched by the Soviets, Ike encouraged the Congress to increase investment in education. In 1958, he signed the National Defense Education Act, to greatly increase the number of students who would become scientists, engineers and teachers.

Earlier, in 1953, Eisenhower wrote this, “ Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.”

In the early 1960’s, President John Kennedy challenged our nation to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade. Many forget how roundly criticized Kennedy was.

“It is too expensive,’ said some.

“The schedule is too ambitious,” complained others.

“It is too hard,” complained still others.

President Kennedy replied, “We go to the moon, not because it is easy, but because it is hard.”

I have been talking about something that is hard, yes, that is expensive, but something even more important than that giant leap for mankind made in the last several generations.

I have lived long enough now to conclude with this observation:  
There is nothing wrong with our children.

I am, however, worried about some of the grownups. If California and America does not wake up to the importance of education, we will be a nation in decline in less time than you might imagine. China and India are in the process of building hundreds of colleges. Think about it and act accordingly.

Please help us to open wide the doors to the future such that the best and brightest, most compassionate and most visionary of our candidates is bounding through the doors of our future. Time is of the essence. I hope that before the end of the next decade, we can say that California has the finest public school system in the United States. I am frankly very skeptical that the leadership of this state at this time has the conscience and the character to do what previous generations did. It is pitiful.

So my advice is to streamline this system along the lines suggested by the Master Plan if you can. Give the Superintendent of Public Instruction real responsibility and the staff to hold people accountable under federal and state law. Today the California Department of Education has about 1500 staff, most funded by the federal government. When I left office, we had perhaps 1600. At the same time, there were 4800 at the Water Resources board and department. They were administering less than 1/2 of 1% of the state budget. We were administering over 40 % of the budget. When I took office I had fewer special education consultants than the State of Maine. So make certain when you give responsibility to the Superintendent or the Secretary, you provide them with the means to do their job.

I would give the Secretary of Education real responsibility for improving student achievement. Get rid of the State Board of Education or give it narrow and discreet responsibilities and have it staffed by the Secretary's staff.

I would put the California Teacher Credentialing Commission under the Superintendent. Stop micromanaging inputs, like which textbooks are used.

Have the department rate the texts but give districts the freedom to buy what they want. Get rid of the Curriculum Commission, the Instructional Materials Panel and the Curriculum Review Panel. Do what a majority of the states do. Let the districts decide what books to use. Stop prescribing the pedagogical approach to be used. Emphasize much more heavily the need to get students to high standards by extending the school day and school year. A dramatic increase in safety nets such as summer school, after school and Saturday school programs is overdue for English Learners and students who are below grade level generally. This implies raising teacher salaries dramatically.

Many of us who have supported charter schools do so because we want to take off the straightjackets of state strictures. Why not encourage more entrepreneurship against the backdrop of higher achievement standards for all of our schools?

If you are going to give great responsibilities to the County offices then combine them so that you have no more than 12 regional county entities. Some county offices are excellent and some are too small to do the work at hand. But remember we are giving county offices more responsibility because they are local educational entities that are entitled to Proposition 98 funds. The California Department of Education is starved because it is constitutionally forbidden to use Proposition 98 funds. But how can you ensure coherence in such a bifurcated system? Better communication between the Superintendent, the Secretary, the County Offices and the local districts means doing the Legislature and the Governor doing the heavy lifting of clearly giving responsibilities and real funding for the various regulatory functions specifically in statute.

Last, let me say that while I would put much more responsibility at the local level and while I would clearly delineate the work of the various state entities, there is one place where I would expand state authority. I would institute a state level salary schedule for educators similar to that which we have for the California Highway Patrol. Having 1000+ school districts negotiate 1000+ contracts is lunacy. I would make sure those teachers in high poverty, low performing districts had additional class size and salary considerations as well. High cost parts of the state would also receive cost of living adjustments, just as the CHP does.

I confess I am not optimistic that these changes can and will occur. The combination of term limits and the high cost of running for office has left us with a chaotic electoral process where thoughtful stewardship from people who like and respect each other has all but disappeared. Governance looks more like a food fight than a deliberative process. Bad old ideas are resurrected because the institutional memory has all but fled. Lobbyists of various stripes can stop most good reforms. The lousy reforms, that make little difference, sometimes squeak through but few are looking at the big picture.

I wish it were not so but there is not the sense that leaders like Lincoln, Roosevelt, Eisenhower and Kennedy, operating from high-minded values and courageous instinct, are making public policy in California today. Indeed, every single Governor of both parties from Goodwin Knight to Gray Davis, raised taxes when circumstances warranted it. Now “tax” has become as dirty a word as “governing” seems to be.

I am sad for California’s children in this the year of our lord 2007. I think the children of this age are worthy of consideration where education is concerned instead of the dog’s breakfast they are currently being served. Right now, the education governance system of California is not a “system” at all. It looks like something Federico Fellini might have directed. When I was a kid we threw scraps in a bowl for the dog, hence the phrase “the dog’s breakfast” meant a bunch of odds and ends. The California education governance system is really a dog’s breakfast of small ideas.

We keep studying and researching education reforms but we fail to act on the big ideas. As the poet observed, “Of all the words of tongue or pen, the saddest of these is it might have been.” In 1965, California was the envy of the country in education, albeit with some very weak schools in some parts of the state. Today we are the disgrace of the nation, competing with Mississippi at the bottom of the achievement pile. Mississippi never had great schools but California did, making our fall from grace much more of a shame.