

# International Perspectives on U.S. Education Policy and Practice:

## What Can We Learn from High-Performing Nations?



Partnership for  
Global Learning



## I. A Changing World Requires Changing Skills

On April 27-28 2010, Asia Society and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) convened a symposium of six countries, which are either top ranked in international comparisons of educational achievement or have made significant recent improvements in performance, to share their experiences of educational reform with a group of U.S. state and national educational leaders. The meeting built on Asia Society's history of organizing conferences and delegations to examine international best practices in education and CCSSO's leadership in establishing common core standards among states, a step itself influenced by international studies of achievement.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the meeting was to discuss what have been the key drivers of educational improvement in these six countries (Singapore, Finland, England, China, Australia, and Canada) and what are the lessons learned for the U.S. as it seeks to ensure that all students can meet these common standards and, more broadly, are prepared for the twenty-first century global economy.

Recognizing that education will be key to economic growth in a global knowledge and innovation-based economy and that low educational performance exacts measurable economic costs, countries around the world are focusing on increasing graduation rates, raising achievement, making educational systems more equitable, and rethinking the skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The dramatic educational gains made by other nations over the past two decades are such that the U.S. dropped from first to tenth in the world in the proportion of young adults with a high school degree or equivalent in 2006, while on OECD's Program of International

Student Assessment (PISA), the U.S. ranked twenty-fifth in math and twenty-first in science in 2006 and fifteenth in reading in 2003.<sup>3</sup> And the challenges ahead for the U.S. will become even greater as large countries like China and India provide education to a large proportion of their populations. But this is also a moment of unprecedented opportunity. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Obama administration's commitment of resources through its Race to the Top and i3 initiatives are encouraging fundamental rethinking of the K-12 education system.

The discussions at the symposium were rich and wide-ranging.<sup>4</sup> Overall, international experience demonstrates that (a) major improvement on a wide scale is possible within the time frame of a few years; (b) countries use a different mix of strategies because their contexts are different, but there are critical common elements; and (c) success requires creating systems – there are no silver bullets. Some of these nations' reforms have been in place for more than a decade, others are within a few years of inception. All are considered works in progress, because a rapidly changing world requires constantly evolving skills. Most of the international participants have studied and visited U.S. educational institutions and, from an international perspective, the U.S. is widely viewed as a leader in educational innovation but a failure in taking successful practice to scale. A major lesson learned and a recurring theme of the discussion was that the strategies employed to move a system from bad to adequate were not the same, and indeed might be antithetical to, the strategies needed to move from good to great.

## II. The Search for High and Equitable Achievement

The six participating countries discussed the key drivers of their school reform – how and why they undertook certain strategies, with what results.

**Australia:** Australia, a federal system of six states and two territories, is a relatively high-performing country on international assessments, but concerned about growing competition from other countries that are improving faster and its relative lack of equity, Australia has recently (2008) undertaken a major program of reform. This includes the development of a national curriculum in all major subjects (English, mathematics, science, history, geography, world languages, and the arts), the first federal system to do so; new assessments in literacy and numeracy and sample assessments in other subjects; significant new financial resources; and a school reporting service (MySchool.com), which includes private as well as public schools.<sup>5</sup>

**Singapore:** When Singapore became independent from Britain in 1965, it was a poverty-stricken island, with no natural resources, low education levels and conflicting ethnic groups. Now it has world-class math, science, and technical education, and has attracted high-tech industries, global banks, petrochemical, and pharmaceutical industries by closely linking its economic development strategy and its education system. Its initial education strategies focused on nation building (bringing together its three cultural and linguistic groups) and on math, science and technology. Since 1997, its *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation* plan has taken the education system to the next stage, emphasizing global 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for students, greater school autonomy combined with school quality management processes and awards, and a sophisticated system of recruiting and developing excellent teachers and school leaders – to produce “future-ready Singaporeans.”<sup>6</sup>

**England:** A country with some of the world’s oldest universities but relatively low achievement compared with other industrial countries and significant inequities based on traditional social

distinctions and new immigration, England’s school system has been significantly changed over the past decade. Reform strategies have evolved over time. The government of Margaret Thatcher established national standards in reading and math and abolished school districts, devolving authority to local schools. Then the government of Tony Blair, with its emphasis on public sector reform, emphasized clear target setting accompanied by data and professional development. These strategies were initially successful in raising reading and math scores nationwide (from 63% reaching the approved standard at age 11 to 80% reaching the standard in 2004) and increasing scores on international assessments but then hit a plateau for several years. So a new stage developed that focused more deeply on school capacity building, the quality and effectiveness of teachers, recruiting and training school leaders, and pairing low-performing schools with high-performing ones to transfer best practice.<sup>7,8</sup>

**Finland:** Schools have played an important role in transforming Finland from a traditional industrial-agrarian nation into a modern innovation-based knowledge economy. In the 1980s, Finland had a tracked and low-achieving education system that was well below the level of other European countries. Today, Finland is the highest achieving country on PISA international tests of student achievement, has very equitable outcomes (less than 5% variation in performance between schools), and a graduation rate of 96%, all achieved with moderate overall spending. The Finnish approach is quite distinct. Although the curriculum framework is set at the national level, the design of the curriculum is left to teachers. The Finnish system places enormous emphasis on and trust in high-quality teachers. Teaching is a highly admired profession by young Finns because of the autonomy and responsibility it entails. Only one in ten applicants is accepted into teaching. This emphasis on high-quality teachers is combined with a systematic early intervention system whenever a child falls behind, individualized learning plans, a philosophy of “teach less, test less, learn more,” and high quality vocational as well as academic paths in

upper secondary school. While many other countries are trying to improve their achievement through focusing on one or two subjects, standardization, and test-based accountability, the “Finnish way” has only light national direction, a broad and individualized curriculum that emphasizes creativity and a global outlook, and gives trust-based responsibility to excellent teachers.<sup>9,10</sup>

**Canada:** Canada has a highly decentralized federal system with no national Ministry of Education. Standards and curriculum are set at the province level. Ontario, the largest province in terms of population, with 2 million students, 27% of whom are immigrants, was characterized in the 1990s by educational stagnation, labor unrest, and strong public criticism of teachers. A new government introduced a set of reforms in 2003 with the goal of increasing literacy, numeracy, and high school graduation. These reforms, which had a strong focus on building capacity both in the Ontario Department of Education and in schools and among teachers, increased the proportion of students achieving the 6<sup>th</sup> grade provincial standards in reading, writing and math from 55% in 2003 to 67% among English-speaking students and 80% among French-speaking students in

2006-7. They also reduced the number of low-performing schools from 20% to under 5%, raised high school graduation from 68% to 79%, improved teacher morale and reduced the attrition rate of new teachers by two-thirds. While the initiative did not achieve all of its goals, there was significant improvement in a four- year period. Dubbing their initiative, “results without rancor or ranking”, the designers of the Ontario reform argued against the “fallacy that heavy-handed accountability can create success.”<sup>11</sup>

**China:** The world’s largest education system, serving 20% of the world’s students (200 million in elementary and secondary education) with less than 2% of the world’s education resources, China has rapidly expanded its basic education system as its economy has grown. A new 2020 Education Plan issued this year emphasizes making one year of preschool education and nine years of basic education universal. It also focuses on promoting equity, especially in rural areas and for those children who have migrated to the cities, with the goal of having 90% of students in upper secondary school by 2020. China is also developing a broader 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum, strengthening the quality of schools, and training teachers to use ICT.<sup>12</sup>

### III. Investing in Teachers and School Leaders

Developing high common standards is an important step but standards are not self implementing. Attracting, maintaining, and supporting high-quality teachers and school leaders is critical to enabling students to reach high standards and for driving schools forward. Many countries have taken steps to strengthen the quality of their teacher workforce. A high-quality teacher workforce is not due to some vague cultural respect for teachers but is a result of deliberate policy choices. High-performing countries build their human resource systems by putting energy up front - in recruiting, preparing, and supporting good teachers - rather than on the back end of reducing teacher attrition and firing weak teachers. They also systemically identify and nurture leadership talent. There is much innovation internationally in this area, with the

goal of providing for every child the same good teacher we would want for our own child. Key elements of a comprehensive system and examples of international best practice include:

**Recruitment:** Singapore selects prospective teachers from the top one third of their secondary school class. Strong academics are essential but so is a commitment to the profession and to serving diverse students. Trainees receive a stipend equivalent to 60% of a teacher’s salary while in training and commit to teaching for a minimum of three years. Singapore also recruits mid-career candidates, believing their work experience is valuable to students. China too pays significant attention to recruiting strong candidates to become teachers through its “gardeners project” and gives scholarships to

young people who live in rural areas to become teachers there. In Finland, teaching is now a highly sought after profession –only one in ten applicants are accepted into teacher preparation programs after two rounds of selection. A critical condition for attracting the most able young people into teaching is that teachers’ work is seen as an independent and respected profession rather than a mere technical implementation of externally mandated standards and tests. In England, a series of steps were taken to raise the status of the teaching profession: a sophisticated advertising campaign recruited new candidates; teacher awards programs on television raised the profile of teaching; alternate school-based routes into teaching were allowed to compete with traditional university teacher training programs; and bonuses were used to attract teachers to commit to teaching in high-need communities. The result was that teaching went from 92<sup>nd</sup> to a top career choice within five years. In all these countries, attention to recruitment and induction into the profession, means far lower attrition rates among new teachers than in the U.S. where attrition rates for teachers in their first five years of teaching reach fifty percent in some areas.

***Teacher preparation:*** Teacher education is simultaneously the worst problem and best solution. There is considerable variation in approaches to modernizing teacher education. In Singapore, China, and Finland, the traditional teacher preparation programs are accepted and valued and adaptations to changing skill needs are made within the institutional framework. In Canada, the teacher education institutions were regarded as too hard to change and the reformers ignored them and focused primarily on professional development of existing teachers. In England, creation of alternate routes and competition with traditional providers, was the change strategy. Whatever the institutional base, teacher preparation programs are placing more emphasis on guided practice in classroom settings from the very beginning of training; greater attention to using data and assessment to guide instruction; and the need to prepare students for the global context and the “21<sup>st</sup> century” skills of problem-solving and creativity.

***Professional Development:*** According to Malcolm Gladwell<sup>13</sup>, it takes a professional roughly 10,000 hours before they feel expert at their job. So regular professional development from beginning teaching to advanced practice is essential for effective teaching and learning. The question is how to link effective forms of professional development to the instructional agenda of the school and to do so at scale, for all teachers. England and Canada had centrally organized professional development workshops as a core part of their literacy and math initiatives. The province of Victoria in Australia ties professional development directly to school improvement goals. China has a long tradition of weekly teacher research groups that focus on classroom improvement. In Finland, teachers decide on their own professional development needs, while in Singapore, where 100 hours of professional development are guaranteed each year, part is required study and observation, and part is of the teachers own choosing. In order to make time for teachers to engage in deep improvement of their practice, Singapore’s policy approach of “teach less, learn more” frees up time in the school day for professional development as well as planning and working with students outside the classroom. Generally, teachers in Asia and Europe spend fewer hours teaching classes and more on professional development, providing feedback to students individually, and collaboratively diagnosing problems and designing solutions than do U.S. teachers. The trade-off for this tends to be larger class sizes.

***Compensation and Evaluation:*** International studies show that entry level salaries need to be roughly comparable to those of other jobs that employ graduates in order to attract high-quality graduates into teaching as a career. Beyond the entry level, working conditions - being treated as a professional, having the opportunity to work with colleagues, and the perception of a career ladder - seem more important than salary per se. How teachers are evaluated, by whom and whether any compensation is tied to evaluation, is a contested area in many countries and there is great variation in practices. Typically, principals do evaluations and this can alienate teachers if they do not believe the evaluation is based on real knowledge

of teaching practice. Finland and Canada, on the one hand, do not believe there is empirical evidence to support merit pay approaches, but have extensive principal and teacher conversations about student progress. Chinese and Singaporean teachers, on the other hand, receive bonuses for performance. In Singapore, teachers' performance is appraised annually by several people and on multiple measures, including classroom delivery, collaboration with parents and community groups, and contribution to their colleagues and the school as a whole.

**Teacher Distribution:** For those countries that have a uniformly strong profession, such as Finland, this issue becomes relatively unimportant. However, larger countries do have to pay attention to teacher distribution. China staffs its rural schools by giving scholarships to people in rural areas to train as teachers. Rural teachers also earn 10% more and may have housing built for them too. They receive long distance professional development through satellite television, internet, and through the organization of schools into clusters with one central resource center for materials and assistance. The Australian federal government also gives financial incentives to teach in rural areas, away from the coasts where most young Australians prefer to live. Bonuses to teach in hard-to staff urban schools are a common practice globally.

**Principals:** At the same time that most countries are establishing national standards, they are also devolving more authority for meeting those standards to the school level. This has brought increasing attention to the importance of effective recruitment and training of prospective principals. England established the National College of

School Leadership and also developed programs for aspiring leaders and peer support mechanisms for new head teachers (principals) in their first two years. China has two main university-based centers on school leadership, one for primary and one for secondary schools that run extensive executive training sessions for current principals based on leadership training practices in other sectors and other countries. In Australia,<sup>14</sup> the state of Victoria has developed a systematic series of leadership development opportunities for aspiring leaders, assistant principals and principals. In Singapore, leadership talent among teachers is identified early and these teachers are moved into middle management and then assistant principal roles with accompanying experiences and training. Then, prospective principals spend six months at the Leaders in Education program at the National Institute of Education. The focus of principal training is on innovation and school transformation and includes a project to revamp some aspect of their current school as well as a two-week trip to study a significant innovation elsewhere in the world.

The roles of teachers are changing. Teachers are now expected to prepare knowledge workers not factory workers, to help *every* child succeed not just the "easy to teach", to adapt to and harness new technologies, and to teach higher order cognitive skills. For all these reasons, we will need even higher quality teachers in the future than in the past. There may be a need for a more differentiated labor forces with fewer, higher quality and better paid teachers rather than the recent approach of hiring large numbers of teachers to reduce class size, a strategy that has shown to be an unproductive educational investment.

#### IV: Driving Equity

The long-term costs of educational failure are high both for individuals and society. A fair and inclusive educational system, on the other hand, is one of the most powerful levers to make society more equal and improving the level of cognitive skills in a population has a significant effect on

GDP.<sup>15</sup> So, while social background and economic conditions affect student academic performance universally, every country aspires to have both strong academic performance and high equity in results, tempering if not virtually eliminating the relationship between ethnicity,

class and social status on the one hand and academic performance on the other. The U.S. does very poorly on international tests compared with other countries in that it is both relatively low-performing and highly inequitable in results. What are some of the approaches that have been shown to mitigate the impact of social background on achievement and improve performance among low-income students in other countries?

**Effective systems:** High-performing and high equity countries have built educational systems that serve all students effectively. Key elements include common high standards that articulate learning outcomes and make it clear to students and teachers what educational excellence is. These standards are coupled with increasing decentralization of authority to schools, accompanied by accountability. There is also a strong and systematic focus on strengthening the teaching profession (see previous section).

**Structural reforms:** The design of school systems can itself powerfully influence outcomes. Early tracking in elementary and lower secondary schools or lack of alternative options in upper secondary schools or extreme socio-economic disparity between schools are all associated with increased inequity. Structural changes can therefore produce significant progress. **Poland**, for example, which abolished separate tracked schools before age 16 in 1999, reduced the school failure rate from 50% to 17% within five years.

**School-based interventions:** There are a range of classroom interventions that have been shown to increase academic achievement for low-income students, especially in the area of reading, the best researched area. England and Ontario, for example, have organized national and provincial literacy and numeracy campaigns. In England this raised literacy scores from 63% reaching the standard to 80% reaching the standard at age eleven.<sup>16</sup> In Canada,<sup>17</sup> the province of Ontario raised the proportion of students reaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade provincial standards from 55% in 2003 to 67% among English-speakers and 80% among French-speakers by 2006-7. By contrast special education and retention in grade, two widely used

strategies in some countries, are significant budget expenditures but have shown little impact on performance. Perhaps the most systemic approach to intervention is in Finland where a major focus of teacher training is on teaching students with different skills levels, and a sequence of intensifying interventions, in and beyond the classroom, catches those students who are behind. In fact, most students in Finland receive special help at some point in their educational careers. As a result only 1% of Finnish 15 year-olds lack basic reading skills.<sup>18</sup>

**Outside school supports:** Research has clearly shown the significance of cognitive and emotional development in the pre-school years and the benefits of early childhood education on success in school. Most countries therefore are expanding early childhood services. In addition, countries are developing supports for later in life. England, for example, a country with considerable childhood poverty, is trying to integrate a range of children's services with education. In Finland, inside school and outside school supports are relatively seamless. While Asian education systems have the benefit of more stable families than many western countries, in Singapore, schools work with community groups to create family-like supports for those areas where stable two-parent families do not exist.

**Targeting Resources:** The United States is unusual in its heavy reliance on local wealth to finance education. Many countries have relatively equitable expenditures across schools or have mechanisms for targeting resources on disadvantaged students or geographic areas. In China for example, where local and provincial finances and parent fees pay for schools, most of the central government's educational contributions go to disadvantaged areas.

**Low-Performing Schools:** The highest performing countries have focused on creating effective *systems* of education that work for all children rather than separate strategies focused on low-performing schools. However, Canada, England and Australia have all developed initiatives for turning around low-performing schools. In England, different types of schools

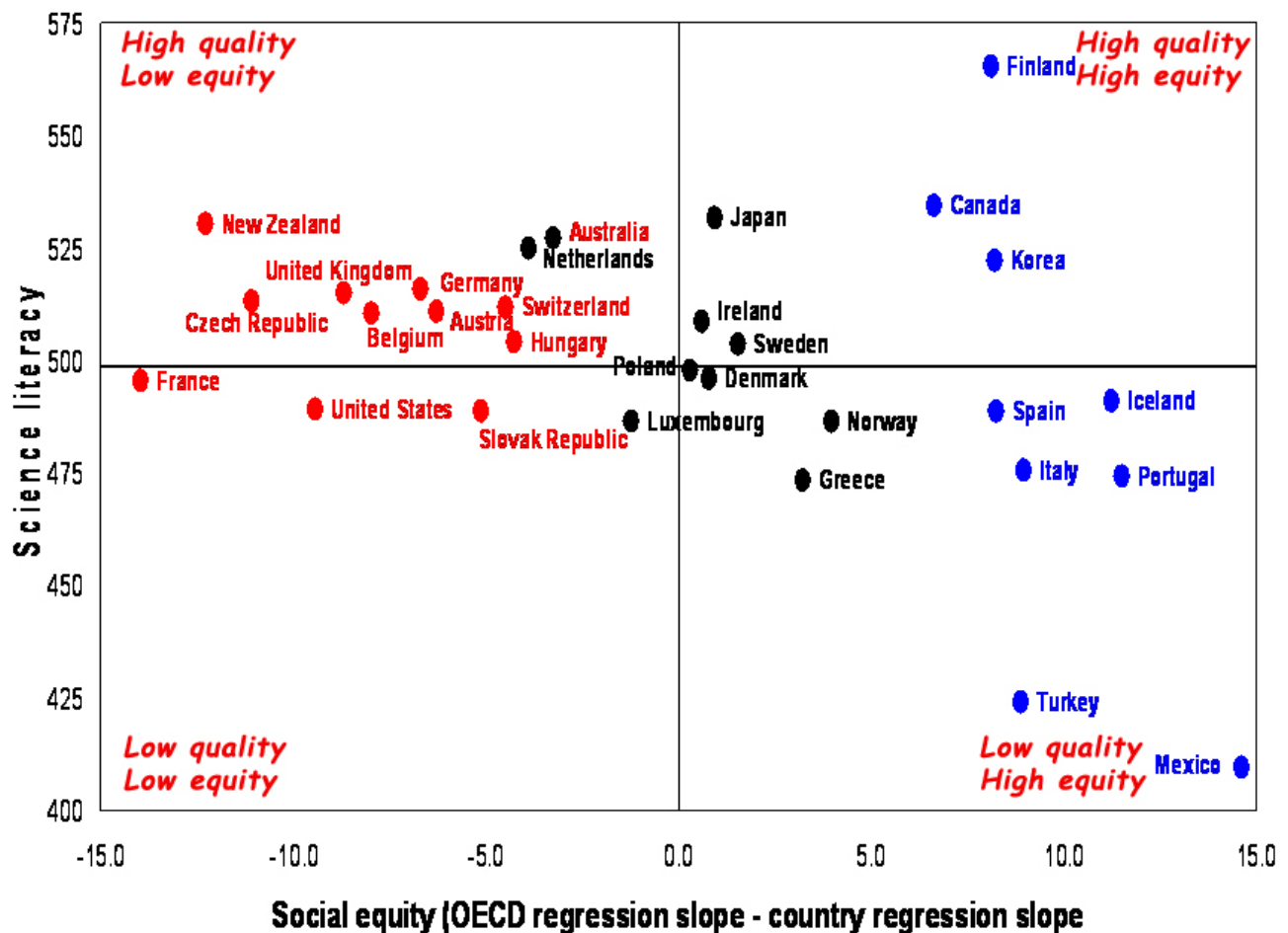
from underperforming to failing schools were identified. Underperforming schools were paired with high-performing ones, which turned these schools around significantly in 18 months. Failing schools received more intensive intervention but all relied on a school-supporting-school strategy.

**Technology:** While not a major focus of conversation at the symposium, technology clearly has a role to play in overcoming inequities in education. Australia's new national curriculum, for example, will have a range of curriculum resources and tools for teachers available online to overcome regional resources inequities and help all students meet the national standards.<sup>19</sup> China uses satellite and distance learning technology to reach schools in its vast rural areas with high quality science education as well as to support its rural teachers.<sup>20</sup> Technology allows the

increasing collection of data on student achievement to inform and track progress.

A growing challenge for all countries is immigration. Poor U.S. results on international assessments are often attributed to the proportion of immigrants in the U.S. population. But of the countries taking part in PISA in 2003, the US ranked 10th in the proportion of 15-year-olds with an immigrant background and all countries with larger immigrant shares outperformed the U.S. Still this is an area where all countries need to improve and is ripe for more detailed cross-national research and discussion of best practice. China has an enormous problem with rural to urban migration. The fastest and largest rural-urban migration in history has brought 350 million migrant children into cities. Educating these children is an important part of China's 2020 education plan.<sup>21</sup>

**Social Gradients for Science (PISA 2006)<sup>22</sup>**



## V: Improving Assessment

The U.S. is considering making significant changes in its assessment system. The state-led effort to develop common core standards in literacy and math is driving interest in new assessments to match those standards. President Obama has talked about the need for tests that go beyond “bubbling in”. In international perspective, U.S. students are often seen as “overtested and underexamined,” but new funding from the Obama administration offers the opportunity to change the direction of educational assessment.

The U.S. assessment paradigm differs from the best practices of the rest of the world in: (1) Its frequent external high-stakes testing of young students (most countries rely primarily on school-based testing in elementary school). (2) Its heavy reliance on frequent, cheap multiple-choice tests, which measure a limited range of knowledge and skills, provide an inaccurate picture of what students know, are of little use to teachers in understanding students’ needs or how to design instruction, and have led to parental concern that they are negatively affecting student learning by narrowing the curriculum and focusing education on lower-order skills, especially for low-income and minority students. (Indeed, some people argue that one reason for U.S. students’ poor performance on international tests is the heavy reliance on low-level multiple-choice tests here compared with other countries). (3) The lack of teacher involvement in the design and grading of external examinations. (4) The lack of connection between standards and the curriculum, instructional and professional development support provided for secondary school course-based examinations (such as Cambridge, International Baccalaureate etc.) that are more common in other countries.

Tests perform a number of functions in education – public accountability, informing and improving instructional practice, and monitoring student progress. No single assessment can satisfy all these purposes and there is a spectrum of practices internationally in how these demands are balanced. At one end, Finland, the highest

performing country in the world on PISA assessments, uses primarily school-based assessment with only periodic sample testing from the national level to monitor quality. Its accountability model is based on professional rather than test-based accountability. Countries with large numbers of low-performing schools, that are focused primarily on bringing up the bottom, tend to be at the other end of the spectrum, with a heavy focus on external accountability testing. The school systems of Asian countries represent a third approach, having traditionally been driven by university entrance examinations, which allocate the, until recently, very scarce opportunities for higher education. Most countries today share similar goals of raising achievement and reducing achievement gaps between groups and the need for schools to be accountable for those results, but there is considerable concern about the negative and narrowing effects on education systems of overweighting external tests.

Both European and Asian countries are shifting the balance of their assessment systems toward a greater use of more formative assessment, better use of data by schools to improve instruction and performance, greater involvement of and professional development for teachers on assessment, and more authentic measurement of higher order skills. “As a large and increasing part of their examination systems, high-achieving nations use open-ended performance tasks and school-based curriculum-embedded assessment to give students opportunities to develop and demonstrate higher order thinking skills: the abilities to find and organize information to solve problems, frame and conduct investigations, analyze and synthesize data, and apply learning to new situations.”<sup>23</sup>

Curriculum-embedded assessments give teachers timely information they need to help students improve and the process of collective scoring that many nations use to ensure reliability also prove educative for teachers who learn to calibrate their understanding of the standards to common benchmarks.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, scoring student work

allows teachers to discover trends in the quality and content of what students produce that can be linked to the nature of the assignment itself—what students were asked to do—or the instructional activities that teachers employed.

These directions in assessment are an example of the change in policies and strategies as countries focus on moving from good to great and on the new demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century innovation economy.

## VI: Learning with the World and Looking Ahead: What Matters Most

***What were some of the lessons learned from high-performing or rapidly improving countries about what matters most in raising educational performance?***

*First, in terms of bringing about major advances in education,* participants emphasized that there are no quick fixes but that significant change is possible over a five-to-ten year period. Success requires a clear sense of moral purpose, a guiding and persistent political coalition, effective leadership at every level, a focus on building capacity to make the necessary improvements, engagement of broad support, transparency, and the use of evidence.

*Second, how did international participants perceive U.S. education reform efforts?* International participants all emphasized that they have learned a lot from the U.S, which is seen as an innovator in education. However, they see that the U.S. has failed to build an effective system of education to educate all children. This is partly due to the inherent difficulties of achieving alignment when there are so many different levels of authority. Other perceived barriers are the huge acceptance of inequality in the structure and funding of schools, the lack of a human resources system for educator recruitment and development, and the frequency of policy changes without providing support to and building the capacity of schools to implement the changes.

*Third, in terms of the overall lessons learned from their education reforms,* participants agreed that when achievement is low and uneven, strong government intervention is needed. However, they emphasized that moving a system from good to great, in which every school is a great school, entails going beyond some of the top-down policy prescriptions that have dominated many reforms

and narrowed the curriculum to a small range of subjects and lower-order skills, to a focus on building the capacity and creativity of schools, and generating a professional knowledge culture in which best practice is codified and shared. The essential task is to design reforms that effectively address performance deficits particularly among low income and minority children – closing achievement gaps -- while not denying acquisition of higher order thinking skills and a broader curriculum needed in a global knowledge-based economy and creating what might be called an “opportunity gap.”

*Fourth, in terms of the three specific areas of discussion, high-performing and improving systems:*

- Emphasize recruiting, preparing, supporting and compensating teachers on the front end rather than reducing teacher attrition and firing weak teachers on the back end
- Provide teachers regular and effective professional development that directly addresses the instructional challenges where they teach.
- Evaluate teachers on a variety of indicators that provide formative feedback useful in improving instruction and multiple indicators for summative performance evaluation
- Systematically seek out leadership talent and provide effective training that will enable prospective school principals to lead schools to higher achievement.
- Emphasize the prevention of school failure through early identification and

intervention and systematic, sustained support that includes linkages to health and social services.

- Do not tolerate vast inequities in resources or student performance between schools or between groups of students and target extra support where there is the greatest need for improvement.
- Utilize assessments systems that balance standardized tests with greater use of performance assessments that emphasize cognitive skills development.
- Engage teachers in the design of curriculum, instruction and assessment so that they are aligned and to strengthen teachers' understanding of how to reach standards.

***Finally, what of the future?*** This symposium analyzed what countries have done to raise educational performance up until this point. But nothing stands still. What will their education systems look like in the future? While not the primary focus of the discussion, there were some fascinating glimpses. China, which has just released its 2020 plan for education, is an example of a country with an ambitious and long-term plan for education that addresses quality development and equity on a massive scale while combining the traditional focus on rigor in its curriculum with a new emphasis on creativity and applications. Other countries stressed their movement towards more personalized learning rather than a lockstep march through courses, a broader curriculum emphasizing creativity and a global perspective, and a changed role for the teacher as information technology makes learning possible anywhere, anytime.

We have much to learn from other countries, as they have been doing from us. Despite the obvious differences of cultures and political systems, the elements of a strong educational system are not that different, although they need to be adapted to the local context. High-achieving countries routinely scan the world for ideas and best practices. The U.S. has been less involved with study of international best practices as a tool for improvement. Learning with the world needs to become part of our DNA too.

*Support for this report generously provided by MetLife Foundation.*

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**Washington, DC  
April 27 – 28, 2010**

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Wang Dinghua, Deputy Director General, Basic  
Education Department  
Ministry of Education of the PRC

Joanne Weiss, Director, Race to the Top  
U.S. Department of Education

Brenda Welburn, Executive Director  
National Association of State Boards of Education

Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director  
CCSSO

Judy Wurtzel, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of  
Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development  
U.S. Department of Education

*Support for this symposium and report generously provided by MetLife Foundation.*

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<sup>1</sup> We would also like to thank Andreas Schleicher of OECD, Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University, and Dan Leeds and Bob Wise of the Alliance for Excellent Education for their help in developing and conducting this symposium.

<sup>2</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: The Long-Run Economic Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes*, (OECD: 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Schleicher and Vivien Stewart, “Learning from World-Class Schools,” *Education Leadership* 66 no. 2 (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Videos of international expert presentations can be seen on the web at: <http://asiasociety.org/education-learning/learning-world/new-initiative-learning-world>

<sup>5</sup> Barry McGaw, “The Key Drivers of High Performance Systems –Australia” (Presentation at the symposium: *International Perspectives on U.S. Education Policy and Practice: What can we Learn from High Performing Nations?*, Washington, DC, April 27 – 28, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Ho Peng, “The Singapore Story” (Presentation at the symposium: *International Perspectives on U.S. Education Policy and Practice: What can we Learn from High Performing Nations?*, Washington, DC, April 27 – 28, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> David Hopkins, “Every School a Great School: A perspective from England” (Presentation at the symposium: *International Perspectives on U.S. Education Policy and Practice: What can we Learn from High Performing Nations?*, Washington, DC, April 27 – 28, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> David Hopkins, “The Emergence of Systems Leadership” (National College for School Leadership, March 2009). <http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/docinfo?id=21854&filename=the-emergence-of-system-leadership.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Pasi Sahlberg, “The Most Wanted: Teachers and Teacher Education in Finland,” in *International Teacher Education: Practices & Policies in High Achieving Nations*, ed. Linda Darling-Hammond & Ann Lieberman (New York: Routledge Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Pasi Sahlberg, “Key Drivers of Educational Performance in Finland” (Presentation at the symposium: *International Perspectives on U.S. Education Policy and Practice: What can we Learn from High Performing Nations?*, Washington, DC, April 27 – 28, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Ben Levin, Avis Glaze, and Michael Fullan, “Results without Rancor or Ranking: Ontario’s Success Story,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 90 no. 4 (2008) p. 280.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Dinghua, “Toward 2020: Reform and Development of K-12 Education in China” (PowerPoint presented at the symposium: *International Perspectives on U.S. Education Policy and Practice: What can we Learn from High Performing Nations?*, Washington, DC, April 27 – 28, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve Inc, “Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education,” 2008. <http://www.achieve.org/files/BenchmarkingforSuccess.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *The High Cost of Low Educational Performance: The Long-Run Economic Impact of Improving PISA Outcomes*, (OECD: 2010).

<sup>16</sup> David Hopkins, *Every School a Great School* (Open University Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Ben Levin, *How to Change 5,000 Schools: A Practical and Positive Approach for Leading Change at Every Level* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Pasi Sahlberg, “The Most Wanted: Teachers and Teacher Education in Finland,” in *International Teacher Education: Practices & Policies in High Achieving Nations*, ed. Linda Darling-Hammond & Ann Lieberman (New York: Routledge Press, 2009).

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<sup>19</sup> Barry McGaw, “President’s Report: Transforming Australian Education,” *Dialogue* 29 no. 1 (2010)  
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<sup>20</sup> Asia Society. *Math and Science Education in a Global Age: What the U.S. Can Learn from China* (New York: Asia Society, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Dinghua Wang, “Toward 2020: Reform and Development of K-12 Education in China” (PowerPoint presented at the symposium: *International Perspectives on U.S. Education Policy and Practice: What can we Learn from High Performing Nations?*, Washington, DC, April 27 – 28, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> OECD, *PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow’s World. Vol I: Analysis* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2007), p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond, “Performance Counts: Assessment Systems that Support High-Quality Learning,” Council of Chief State School Officers (2010) p. 3. <http://www.ccsso.org/publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=381>

<sup>24</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond and Ray Pecheone, “Reframing Accountability: Using Performance Assessments to Focus on Higher-Order Skills” in *Meaningful Measurements*, ed L. M. Pinkus (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009) p. 11.