

Leadership in Education

A VIEW FROM THE STATES

Mr. Hunt, former governor of North Carolina, describes the actions taken in his state from 1977 to the present to improve education there — a story that has begun to converge with the story of educational improvement nationally.

PAPERS FROM THE DUKE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

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IN THIS special section, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and four of the five living former secretaries of education have helped trace the history of the Education Department and its role in improving education in America. They have reflected on



their times in office and outlined their visions for the future of education in the United States. Here I offer a parallel to their reflections, written from my vantage point as governor of North Carolina from 1977 to 1985 and — after an eight-year hiatus, during which I continued to work at improving education in North Carolina and nationally — from 1993 to 2001. We all remember from geometry class that parallel lines do not converge, but while this principle is true in geometry, it is not necessarily true in history. So I will conclude with some remarks about the way educational improvement in North Carolina has begun to converge with the story of educational improvement nationally. If you will permit me to boast a bit, I will first show why and how I think North Carolina may be just a little ahead of the nation in improving our schools.

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LESSONS FROM MY FIRST TEACHER

My mother was a teacher — a marvelous English teacher who loved to teach. So, early in my life, I saw what successful teaching was and how all students learned from it, because I saw my mother's excellent teaching close up.

Many of my mother's students were poor. Unlike some people, my mother never looked down on the poor students and their families. She didn't see students as rich or poor but saw their potential to learn and went the extra mile to make sure they did.

That's why I've always had a vision of how teachers can teach well, how students can learn, and how we can have successful schools in which all students are taken care of and expected to do well. It's a vision that has guided me throughout my public life, and it is why I went into politics. Each of the four times I ran for governor, I didn't run just to be governor. I ran to do something and in particular to get something done in education.

I first ran for governor in 1976, saying that every child must learn to read in the early grades because I had seen too many children being promoted not knowing how to read. Once in office, I launched the Primary Reading Program, which put teachers' assistants in every classroom in the first, second, and third grades. In my next campaign, in 1980, I focused on economic growth — how to be globally competitive — and on education as the key to economic growth. When I ran again, in 1992, I pledged to implement standards and accountability as part of our public education system. I was determined that North Carolina schools would not graduate any more students who didn't have the skills to get a good job. And I ran to help every child get a good start in life. In 1996 I ran on the platform of raising standards for teachers and raising teachers' pay to the national average.

FIRST IN PROGRESS TO 'FIRST, PERIOD'

Now, as we enter a new century, North Carolina is on target to achieve all those goals. The National Education Goals Panel, a bipartisan group formed in 1990 by President George H. W. Bush and the nation's governors, reported in December 1998 that no state's schools were making more progress in more areas than North Carolina's. That same year *Education Week*, the nation's premier education newspaper, said North Carolina was one of the top 12 states *overall* in education and cited

us as one of two states doing the most to put in place real, meaningful accountability measures. The best state-by-state comparison is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), sometimes called the "nation's report card." NAEP showed that in the 1990s our students made the greatest gains among all the states on math tests given to fourth- and eighth-graders.

We were clearly improving our schools, but as I began my last two years as governor, I sensed we needed something more. I asked myself how we could keep our progress going to benefit every child in this generation and in generations to come. I wanted people in North Carolina to commit to a goal that we would work toward over time and that would help keep up the momentum. But what could that goal be? It had to be a goal worthy of our people, our state, our history, and our potential. It should be a goal that would make us stretch.

I decided to issue a challenge to North Carolinians in my final state of the state address in early February 1999. I talked first about our progress, noting that "North Carolina's not just leading the South; North Carolina's leading the nation in education reform." Then I said, "I believe that if we can lead the nation in education progress, we can lead the nation in education, period. So tonight I am announcing a new initiative to set new goals for our schools. I challenge North Carolinians to raise our sights and raise our schools to an even higher level. Let's commit ourselves to this ambitious goal: *By the year 2010, North Carolina will build the best system of public schools of any state in America. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, we will be first in education.*"

GETTING FOCUSED

In preparing that speech, I realized that our state's and my own thinking were not yet focused enough, not clear enough about what "quality" really is. It means becoming better, to be sure, but how much better, and what do we need to do to reach that point? For one thing, I knew we needed to begin measuring our progress more rigorously and reporting the results to the public.

After setting out the "First in America" challenge, I went to North Carolina's Education Cabinet, which is chaired by the governor and includes the superintendent of public instruction, the chairman of the state board of education, the president of the University of North Carolina system, the president of the commu-

nity college system, and the president of the State Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. I asked these leaders to commit themselves and their systems to becoming “first in America” by 2010 and to work with me to determine precisely what that meant and how we would get there.

Together, we established five goals that we believed would go a long way toward making “First in America” a reality:

Goal 1. *A smart start.* Every child must start school healthy and ready to learn. That’s what the early-childhood initiative we call Smart Start is all about.

Goal 2. *Excellent teaching.* Every student must have a good teacher every year, and every school must have a good principal.

Goal 3. *Safe schools.* Schools must be safe, orderly, and caring places. Students can’t learn in schools where they’re afraid. That’s an important part of making schools successful and helping children to learn.

Goal 4. *High student performance.* We must have high expectations and high standards for student performance. This means setting out specifically what students need to know and be able to do in order to be successful. Our expectation is that every student will learn that much and more. If we don’t expect them to learn, they won’t. If we do expect students to learn and if we provide the resources that are necessary, they will learn.

Goal 5. *Business, community, and family support.* The schools must have strong support from business, the community as a whole, and especially from students’ families. And every child who needs extra help should have a mentor.

In addition to setting goals, we knew we would have to measure our progress in order to continuously assess what direction to take. To help accomplish this, we established an annual report card to reflect where North Carolina stands in public education. What states are “first” in certain areas? Where does North Carolina fit in the ranking, and are we improving?

In 2000, for the first time, North Carolina issued a thorough and comprehensive report card that objectively measured where we were in all five areas noted above. We intend to use this report card to measure our progress every year until at least 2010.

What the *First in America 2000 Report* showed was this: “Put simply, the state’s educational system is now performing a little better than average. But just a little.” We had once been near the bottom. By 2000 we weren’t at the very top, but we had come a long way

because we had already done a lot of work toward the goals I set with the Education Cabinet.

A SMART START

I used to believe, as many others did, that if we just worked hard enough at improving the schools, we could help every child learn. If a child didn’t learn, we just hadn’t tried hard enough or provided enough resources. As we now know, critical developments that are essential to children’s future learning occur in their earliest years.

As I examined this matter further, I realized that we were wrong in thinking we “fix” students later on. We must get it right from the beginning, which means we must do three things: provide good health care; provide good child care, in homes and in child-care centers; and work with parents so that they can help their own children develop and thrive.

With this understanding, I developed a vision of a public/private partnership within each county in North Carolina. The partnerships would bring together those with a stake in children’s well-being — parents, educators, health professionals, business leaders, members of religious congregations, and others — and give them the resources and the authority to carry out *their own* local early childhood initiatives. This vision became Smart Start, now a nationally recognized model for early childhood development. Unlike many programs, Smart Start receives financial support and technical assistance from the government but is a community-based effort.

This approach is paying off in terms of both communities’ commitment to preparing children for school and children’s actual readiness. To some, this is a surprise. When we set our First in America goals and specific targets for improvement, experts in early childhood education thought that, with North Carolina’s history of high poverty rates and low adult-literacy rates, we would do well if we could bring our children up to average on measures of school readiness. But in 2000, when we carried out the first statewide assessment to find out just where we were on this goal, we found that our children were already very close to the national average. They were so close that the Education Cabinet decided to raise the bar and establish a new, higher set of targets over the coming decade.

EXCELLENT TEACHING

I’ve always had a deep respect for teachers, but my

understanding of how complex teaching is has developed over time. Imagine that you're a teacher with 25 students of varying backgrounds, with different levels of knowledge, different ways of learning, different languages, and so on. You have to know your subject matter thoroughly, with new knowledge coming out all the time. You're responsible for making sure your students keep learning even while one or two of them may have particular challenges and at times hold up the entire class. That's what teachers face every day!

I learned about these problems from the best teachers in the nation, many of them affiliated with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which I helped found between my second and third terms as governor. The National Board was established to focus on raising standards for teachers and making teaching a more respected profession. In my 10 years as chairman of the organization, I listened for thousands of hours to America's best teachers talk about their work. They explained what accomplished teachers need to know and be able to do, and their input led to a rigorous nationwide system of standards for teachers and "board certification" for those who meet certain standards.

Today there are over 16,000 National Board Certified Teachers, and more than 3,660 of them are in North Carolina — the most of any state in the union. We have the highest number of these accomplished teachers because we've made it clear that we value them — not only by talking about it but by paying teachers' entire cost for the certification process, giving them three days off to prepare for the assessment, and rewarding those who pass with a 12% raise.

National Board certification has helped, but it won't work alone. In my 1996 campaign, I pledged to raise teaching standards to a level that would ensure that every student had a high-quality teacher and to raise teachers' salaries to the national average within four years. The media were startled at such a bold proposal, and a lot of people said we couldn't do it. We were starting at 43rd among the states in teacher salaries. "Governor," people said, "do you know that will cost a billion dollars?" I said, "Yes, I do, and good teachers are worth every penny of it." Four years later, North Carolina had risen from 43rd in the nation to 23rd, and in 2001 we climbed to 20th.

We didn't stop there. In recent years, North Carolina has also implemented a teacher education report card to hold our colleges and universities accountable for producing good teachers; extended the probation-

ary period for new teachers from two years to three, assigned paid mentors to work with them, and required them to submit portfolios on their teaching in order to get continuing licenses; and revamped our master's programs to focus more on subject-matter knowledge, how students learn, and strategies for teaching a diverse student population. And we'll keep working to ensure respect for teachers and high-quality teachers for every student.

SAFE SCHOOLS

Children can't learn if they don't feel safe in school. They can't study if they're not in orderly classrooms and school buildings. They can't succeed if the schools don't have good teachers who know and care about them.

One of the key issues that I believe affects safety and the whole educational enterprise is the size of our schools, an area in which we have made mistakes throughout the country. Too many schools are just too big. Years ago, many people, myself included, believed that the more courses available to students, the better. As a result, we consolidated schools, since the larger the school, the more courses it could offer. Since World War II, the number of schools in the United States has declined by 70%, and the average size of schools has increased by 50%.

This unfortunate trend came about because we thought big schools meant greater efficiency and more opportunities for students. Now there is considerable evidence showing that we were wrong. Too many students get lost in the crowd and fall through the cracks. Of course, many students are doing well, but many others don't feel cared for and don't get much personal attention. I believe that this is one reason why so many students drop out and that we will continue to have a serious problem with dropouts until we make schools smaller and more personal.

To address this problem, we should immediately stop building large schools and begin converting existing huge schools into moderate-sized, effective schools, even small schools. Maybe these "deconsolidated" schools can share resources such as auditoriums, gyms, and athletic fields. But make the revamped schools places in which every student has a place and is known, cared for, and encouraged to participate.

We should think similarly about class size, especially in the early grades, where small class size has been shown to make such a significant difference. If we had

approximately 18 students per class in grades K-3, there would be less disruption, students would learn more, and they would continue to learn more for years to come. This is an expensive proposition, but as with teacher pay, it would be worth every penny.

North Carolina's current governor, Mike Easley, recognizes these needs, and last year, during one of the worst budget shortages in our state's history, Gov. Easley called for enactment of a new K-3 class-size reduction program. The legislature responded with enough funding to begin reducing kindergarten class sizes. This demonstrates North Carolina's unwavering commitment to giving all our children a first-class education.

HIGH STUDENT PERFORMANCE

To have good schools, we must have high standards and high expectations for all schools and all children. This means setting standards and measuring our progress in achieving them.

I had begun to see the need for higher standards in my first terms as governor as I was recruiting industry for North Carolina. Many of the first Japanese plants that came to North Carolina started by putting their low-value assembly functions here while making the valuable components in Japan. That clearly had to change, and it would take bright, creative, and highly educated people to change it.

The challenge we faced was the subject of a national group on which I served in 1990, the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce. Its report was titled *America's Choice — High Skills or Low Wages*, and it recognized the choice we must continuously make in North Carolina and nationally, between low skills and low wages or high skills and high wages.

To achieve high skills and high wages, we must not only provide resources to our schools, we must also measure what and how well we are doing with the resources and what and how much students are learning. Schools must set high, real-world standards for student learning and must ensure that *all* students are taught with those standards in mind. In 1993, to help bring about these objectives, North Carolina established an Education Commission on Standards and Accountability to determine what students need to know and be able to do to graduate and get good jobs. The commission asked business leaders what skills were needed in particular jobs and whether their employees arrived in the workplace with those skills. We then implemented a statewide testing program in grades 3, 5, and 8

and in selected high school courses to measure whether students were learning what they needed to know to move to and be successful in the next grade and ultimately to graduate prepared to enter higher education or the work force.

In the spring of 2001, North Carolina also began to phase in requirements that students perform at grade level on third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade tests in order to be promoted and that they pass an exit exam to graduate from high school. The state's greatest challenge during the decade ahead will be to narrow the existing achievement gap to the point that *all* students are performing at grade level.

We must make clear that our goal is to help students learn every day of the year. When they are facing challenges, our job is to understand their problems and to give them the help they need as soon as they need it. This commitment may require smaller classes, more one-on-one instruction time, more conferences with students and parents, and mentoring in the afternoons, on weekends, and during summer sessions. Maybe students who consistently achieve below grade level will need to be in classes with fewer students. Just as with discipline, our motto should be "Whatever it takes." We must help every student reach grade level and keep going.

BUSINESS, COMMUNITY, AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Business support for education was critical to North Carolina's success during the 1990s. We have been successful in getting businesspeople involved and building their support for public schools because we've reached out to them, asked for their help, and encouraged them to take the lead. Higher standards for schools, higher pay for teachers, better teachers, more technology: these are all components of educational improvement that businesspeople have championed, to great effect.

For example, when we were planning for and implementing Smart Start, banking industry leaders, executives from a number of firms in our Research Triangle Park, and other top business leaders personally testified before the legislature in support of the program. Their involvement made a deep impression on members of the general assembly, including many who had doubts about the value of an early childhood program.

More than 40,000 businesspeople across the state have also volunteered to mentor students, providing

them with role models and helping them with schoolwork. Their dedication sends a message that parents and teachers are not the only ones who care about students and their education. Businesspeople care not only because they too are parents but because they know, better than anyone else, that education *is* economic development.

While businesspeople and other volunteers can contribute significantly to students' success, parents play an even more vital role. Parents are a child's first and most essential teachers. Most parents love their children and care deeply about how they do in life, including in school. But they may not believe they have the power to help much, may not know what to do, and may themselves have had a bad experience in school.

There are several ways that we as parents can help our children learn. We should help them at home, from the time they're born. We should read aloud to them when they're young and in their early school years, which only half of all parents say they do. We should ask about and show continuous interest in their school, their courses, and their homework and show them that their education is important to them, to us, and to the entire family. We should know and be involved with their teachers and their school.

The schools, however, also have a responsibility to get parents involved. Teachers, even given their tremendous time constraints, should work to get to know parents and their students' family situations. Those who do are frequently amazed at how much they learn and how much they can help their students based on that knowledge. Parents, in turn, must be welcoming to teachers who make such efforts. The commitment and involvement of both is critical to students — our future parents and teachers.

SHARING SUCCESS

I suggested earlier that the "parallel" lines of federal and state education policy have now converged. When the U.S. Department of Education was established in 1979, many feared that it would undermine the states' traditional and constitutional authority over education. But the No Child Left Behind Act recently passed by Congress with solid bipartisan support and signed into law by President George W. Bush actually strengthens the role of the states in education reform. It calls on states to test every child every year in grades 3 through 8 and to hold districts and schools accountable for ensuring that all students make "adequate year-

ly progress" toward the states' standards for grade-level proficiency. This means that North Carolina and other states will have to strengthen our accountability systems by including specific provisions to close minority achievement gaps.

The law also authorizes billions of federal dollars to help states and districts meet the new demands for higher and more equitable outcomes. It includes some specific provisions to upgrade teacher professional development, math and science education, technology, and early literacy instruction. But it also extends the trend that has increasingly characterized the federal/state partnership: greater flexibility in the use of funds in return for greater accountability for results.

How can states respond effectively to the demands and opportunities presented by the new law? I have just outlined what we have done in North Carolina and some of the things we still must do to be first in America in education. Caring and concern for our children's future and for our economic competitiveness should spur all states to greater productivity in education. But as the events of September 11 have shown us all, we are citizens of a state, but far more important, we are citizens of a great democratic nation. We need to pull together and help one another along the way. I believe that what we have done and what we have learned about how to bring about effective education reform in North Carolina, in President Bush's own state of Texas, and in many other states should lead to significant, sustained progress in all states.

I have chosen to pursue this progress in one way, though there are many possible approaches. To help education leaders and improve education all across the country, I recently joined with the University of North Carolina system to found the new James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy. The aforementioned National Board for Professional Teaching Standards set out to answer the question "What does a teacher need to know and be able to do in order to help all students learn to high standards — in other words, to be a truly accomplished teacher?" The Hunt Institute will address the question "What does an educational leader need to know and be able to do in order to bring about effective education reform?"

The educational leaders on whom the Hunt Institute will focus are governors, state legislators, members of state boards of education, state superintendents of public instruction, other administrators, teachers, and representatives of higher education. The institute will also involve business leaders, who, as I said earlier, are

often among the strongest, most consistent advocates for high standards, good teachers, and adequate funding for our schools. We will work with members of the media — editors, reporters, and commentators — as they are so often the source of what parents and the public know and think about education. The better all stakeholders understand schools and what makes them work, the more support we will get for sound education policy.

What *do* educational leaders need to know and be able to do? For one thing, they need to understand what kinds of policies actually work to make schools

better and help children learn. They need to know how to get these ideas into place — how to explain the policies to all the people who need to understand them. They also need to know how to build coalitions to support the policies, how to identify people who oppose them and deal with their objections, and how to get good, effective policies implemented through lasting legislation. Regardless of the parties involved, the key is to assist and provide ongoing support to the individuals, agencies, and organizations that *make* education policy and the people who *shape* public education all across the country. **K**

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