

# FOR EACH AND EVERY CHILD

## A STRATEGY FOR EDUCATION EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

### Executive Summary

America's education system fails our nation and too many of our children. Our system does not distribute opportunity equitably. Policymakers decry but tolerate disparities in student outcomes that are not only unfair, but socially and economically dangerous. As a nation, we eloquently say we are committed to academic excellence, but, without more, we have an insufficient response to challenges at home and globally. Our efforts in recent decades have led to some important progress. But it has not been enough. What steps must we take to finally muster the collective will to ensure that every child in America is prepared to participate fully in our civic and economic life?

To address these failings and to answer this urgent question, Congress created the Equity and Excellence Commission. This Commission, composed of a diverse group from many different backgrounds, each with his or her own experience, ideas and responsibilities, each representing a perspective in the nation's ongoing conversation about schools, did not agree on all the myriad issues in those debates. But after listening to scores of educators, scholars and advocates, examining volumes of research reports and other data, and debating fundamental issues for two years, the commission came to the broad, unanimous agreement on the underlying problems, and on fundamental principles and the policies needed to solve them.

The commission's report, *For Each and Every Child: A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence*, presents this critical overarching idea: we must provide sufficient support for our schools and ensure that it is efficiently used so that effective teaching and learning opportunities come together for every child. Too much of the current discussion tries to argue one side or the other – more money or better efficiency. It is clear that we must move toward a system that ensures both.

The report lays out the major elements of an agenda that the commissioners believe to be equal to the scale of the challenge. Commissioners looked at how we can best position the U.S. so we are globally competitive. They debated how best to address some of the large-scale issues that plague our education system, including:

- Too many U.S. students—the future labor force—are not competitive with students across the developed world. In the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings for 2009, the United States was 27th in math.

- Only one in four of America's 52 million K-12 students perform on par with the average student in the highest-performing school systems in the world.
- The challenge is not only global, it's in our backyard. In math, the average African American eighth-grader performs at the 19th percentile of white students. The average Hispanic student is at the 26th percentile. In an age in which a world class education (including mastery of core subjects, critical thinking and problem solving, global awareness and financial literacy), is necessary to compete in the labor market, we are relegating a large and growing portion of our population to bleak economic futures.
- States and districts do not consistently ensure that their poorer schools either receive sufficient funding or ensure that available funds are spent in ways that close opportunity gaps for disadvantaged students.
- Our education system is a diffuse amalgamation of 100,000 public schools of varying types operated by countless state and local school boards in 15,000 school districts and 50 states, subject to state and local political shifts and economic volatility.
- Only 30 percent of our educators come from the top third of the college pool and too often our least-prepared teachers are assigned to those who most need our best.
- Our early childhood preparation varies widely. Only 65 percent of 4-year-olds from the lowest- income backgrounds attend preschool (with many attending low-quality programs), compared with 90 percent from the highest-income backgrounds.

"America has become an outlier nation in the way we fund, govern and administer K-12 schools, and also in terms of performance. No other developed nation has inequities nearly as deep or systemic; no other developed nation has, despite some efforts to the contrary, so thoroughly stacked the odds against so many of its children. Sadly, what feels so very un-American turns out to be distinctly American."

—Commission Report, page 15

There is an urgent need for our nation to tackle these problems to ensure its global competitiveness and deliver educational excellence to ALL students, but the report also examines how

doing so could have a staggering impact on our economy. If African American and Hispanic students performed at the same level as white students in school, the historical evidence indicates we would add some \$50 trillion to our economy.

The commission's report provides a five-part framework of tightly interrelated recommendations to guide policymaking and presents a vision on how local, state and federal governments can, and should, wield power to ensure excellence in education for all of America's children. Some of the highlights of those recommendations include:

- **Equitable School Finance** systems so that a child's critical opportunities are not a function of his or her zip code;
  - The federal government should support states and districts in determining the cost of providing meaningful educational opportunities and high achievement, including human and other resources; adopt and implement a system that will ensure that funding as well as new funding for schools with high concentrations of low-income students. The performance of these systems must be monitored to ensure they are impacting student achievement.
  - States should identify and report on the programs and resources needed to provide all students a meaningful education, ensuring that their systems of funding schools are supported by stable and predictable sources of revenue. States should also develop information systems that will track student achievement based on their needs and access to resources.
- **Teachers, Principals and Curricula** effective enough to provide children with the opportunity to thrive in a changing world;
  - The federal government should initiate a major new grant program that requires participating states to address the teacher quality pipeline as a whole, with a focus on educator support and effectiveness; invest in high-quality residency and scholarship programs to create a steady supply of effective teachers in high needs areas. Additionally, federal law enforcement authority under Titles I and II of ESEA, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act must ensure equitable access to skilled teachers.
  - A new model of educator responsibility should consider requiring states to set a uniform entry 'bar' into teaching, create a Teacher Quality Index for reporting on student access to teachers, and include technology support for team teaching and professional development.
  - State and local policies and requirements of course-taking and graduation should focus on student access to rigorous material and common standards; supported by quality data systems.
- **Early Childhood Education** with an academic focus, to narrow the disparities in readiness when kids reach kindergarten;
  - A federal matching program should guarantee access to high-quality early learning programs for all low-income children within next 10 years; alignment and coordination of federal early childhood programs (Head Start, Early Head Start, etc.) and funding streams should enable state and local governments to coordinate services for their youngest students.
- **Mitigate Poverty's Effects** with broad access not only to early childhood education, but also to a range of support services necessary to promote student success and family engagement in school; effective measures to improve outcomes for student groups especially likely to be left behind—including English language learners, children in Indian country or isolated rural areas, children with special education needs, and those involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. At all levels, governments should align their school finance systems to partner with community-based organizations to improve the quality of the educational experience of students in high-poverty communities and schools by:
  - Supporting dropout prevention programs and high-quality alternative education;
  - Promoting broad-based parent education and engagement;
  - Developing mechanisms to provide basic health services to at-risk students; and
  - Providing funding for extended-learning programs through the 21st Century Community Learning Center program.
- **Accountability and Governance** reforms must make clearer who is responsible for what, attach consequences and supports for student performance as well as for opportunities and resources. From teachers and students, all the way up to state and federal policymakers, everyone should be empowered and held responsible. Accountability should use multiple broad measures that fairly reflect the decisions or performance of students, educators, schools—including charter schools—and systems.

Eliminating disparities—so that each and every child has access to educational excellence—not only benefits students and their families but it is the surest way for America to build a successful and prosperous economy and advance its national interest in a changing world.

For more information please go to <http://www.foreachandeverychild.org>