

The Governors Restructure Schools

The National Governors' Association has established a new initiative for providing direct assistance to the states in improving education.

We, as governors, gave ourselves some very strong advice last year. We said that it was time for results. Did we take our own advice? The answer is emphatically yes, we did.—Governor Thomas H. Kean, National Governors' Association Meeting, 1987.

In *Time for Results* (1986), the nation's governors announced a new education reform agenda that builds upon and extends states' efforts of the past few years. Neither the results they desire nor the policy changes required to bring them about will be accomplished in short order. Therefore, the governors committed the National Governors' Association to report each year from 1987 through 1991 on the progress of states toward realizing their agenda.

Progress on the Reform Agenda

In Traverse City, Michigan, at the 1987 annual meeting, the governors received the first such report, *Results in Education 1987*, and heard about exciting new programs in Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Rhode Island. At a special work session, "Creating Schools for the Future," with leading educators they discussed how the governors can create opportunities by working for education.

Other major initiatives at the 1987 meeting reinforced the governors' concern for education. A report and session on Jobs, Growth, and Competitiveness reiterated the crucial role of education in encouraging economic growth and improving the nation's competitive position in the international economy. Another major project, *Bringing Down the Barriers*, concentrated on removing the interrelated barriers to learning the skills needed to get and keep jobs: welfare dependency, dropping out of school, alcohol and drug abuse, adult illiteracy, and teen pregnancy.

A New Work Group

In *Time for Results*, the governors directed the association to provide direct assistance to states in the development and implementation of reform policies. With support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the U.S. Department of Education, the association has established the Restructuring Schools Project to manage a process of consultation, information sharing, and assistance to states. Initial efforts include:

- rethinking accountability systems for schools in Indiana and Montana;
- organizing schools for productivity with an emphasis on teacher collegi-

ality and shared decision making in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Washington;

- encouraging new roles for teachers in Iowa and North Carolina;
- attracting minority students into teaching in Illinois and through a regional task force working with efforts in Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

- developing policies to assess the quality of undergraduate education in colleges and universities in six states.

In addition, the Restructuring Schools Project will sponsor conferences on such topics as rethinking accountability systems, collective bargaining and restructuring, and the cost and financing of restructured schools. The conferences will link practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. Project papers and issue briefs on these topics will describe examples, offer policy options, and generate interest and action. The project will also collaborate with associations to continue the emphasis on restructuring issues and to disseminate the lessons learned.

The Next Steps

There are a number of actions state policy leaders can take. First, states

should expect to assume greater responsibility for setting educational goals and defining outcome standards. Many states will have to institute long-range planning and goal-setting, so that their goals accurately reflect the broad societal needs schools serve. They also must ensure that goals and outcome standards are not limited to the ones that can readily be measured; rather, states must invest in developing ways to measure the outcomes that truly matter.

Second, states will need to develop more appropriate and realistic sanctions for schools and districts that consistently perform poorly and fail to meet goals. This is where proposals for state takeover or academic bankruptcy come in. States should expect to:

- provide resources and a policy environment that make educational success possible at the local level;
- provide technical assistance and support to districts unable to meet state goals;
- operate local districts that cannot meet state goals until they can operate effectively on their own.

Third, state education agencies will need to stimulate local inventiveness. Both the improvement of educational productivity and the professionalization of teaching will require new school structures. These structures should allow more varied instructional arrangements, greater collegial interaction among teachers, and increased teacher involvement in decision making. New concepts for restructuring must come through carefully supported local efforts, where new ideas can emerge from and be tested against the realities of schools and classrooms. Consequently, states must provide leadership by:

- articulating a vision of restructured schools;
- encouraging local experimentation with various school structures;
- providing support and technical assistance to schools and districts trying new approaches;
- disseminating results to other schools.

Fourth, states will have to examine existing regulations to determine

which interfere with local autonomy regarding educational practices and which serve other purposes. For example, regulations on Carnegie units, class size, and use of instructional time should be reexamined, while rules to protect health, safety, and equal access should be maintained.

Fifth, states will need to develop more useful and sophisticated assessment systems. The process of deregulating practices while holding educators accountable for results requires the capacity to measure the results we want. States need to develop indicators of educational quality that:

- accurately reflect state educational goals;
- accurately measure the higher-level skills demanded by society;
- meet the information needs of educators, policymakers, and the public.

Sixth, the demands for improved outcomes in elementary and secondary education parallel the demands upon higher education institutions. Therefore, states will need to strengthen coordination between their K-12 and higher education systems. Steps to improve the teaching of higher-order skills, improve the assessment of student performance, and strengthen institutional emphases on outcomes will be required for all levels.

Finally, state officials will have to work hard to maintain the broad constituency for education quality. The sweeping changes in educational performance, practice, and policy required to respond to the challenges of the future will not be made overnight. Their success depends upon the continuing support of the public.

The Need for Better Information

In *Time for Results*, the governors posed a question: "How will we know we are succeeding?" Policymakers, educators, parents, and concerned citizens—all want reliable information about our nation's schools. There is increased concern about how we measure and report what students know and are able to do. The emphasis on results has focused attention not only on student outcomes in each state but

also on the need to refine the information base to reflect more accurately the context in which schooling takes place, the inputs or resources available, and state education policies and practices.

Efforts are now under way to correct many data collection problems. The National Assessment of Educational Progress is considering recommendations to include state-by-state data on student performance. The Center for Educational Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education is redesigning its elementary and secondary data collection program and collecting more comprehensive information on post-secondary education. The Center for Educational Statistics and the State Education Assessment Center for the Council of Chief State School Officers are working with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to develop and collect better indicators of education quality. The Governors' Association is working with these federal and state organizations to help build an integrated data collection system.

Future Prospects

The governors have played a critical role in enlisting the support of the public and the business community for investments in educational excellence. At some point, political leaders will move on to other issues. Consequently, the education community will need to assume a larger role in maintaining and renewing public support for education. But for now, the governors have committed their association to a long-term focus on education. □

References

- National Governors' Association. *Time for Results*. The Governors' 1991 Report on Education. Washington, D.C.: NGA, August 1986.
- National Governors' Association. *Results in Education 1987*. Washington, D.C.: NGA, July 1987.

Authors' note: Time for Results and Results in Education 1987 are available from the National Governors' Association.

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