



PREPARED TESTIMONY FOR JAMES B. HUNT, JR.
CHAIRMAN, JAMES B. HUNT, JR. INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY FOUNDATION BOARD
FORMER GOVERNOR OF NORTH CAROLINA (1977-1985; 1993-2001)

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
OF THE UNITED STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APRIL 29, 2009

STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH COMMON ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McKeon, and members of the Committee, it is an honor to be here today to discuss the need for common national standards that are rigorous and relevant, and the critical role they play in strengthening America's economy on a long-term basis.

Let me be clear from the very beginning. We need a set of common state standards that are rigorous and relevant, and we must stop fooling around. Today, the variability in state standards is off the charts. There should not be 50 different versions of algebra I across the nation. It's just not logical; students in California learn the same as students in North Carolina.

We must be vigilant in our development of common standards that are **fewer, clearer, and higher**. The process for getting there **must be based on evidence of what's necessary and sufficient for students to succeed in college and in work—not on including everyone's, or every interest group's, opinion**. It should be a **tight common core that teachers can teach and students can understand and master**.

As governor of North Carolina for 16 years, I conducted my share of trade missions. When visiting India, China, South Korea, and other developing nations, I witnessed countries intensely focused on educating students to compete in a knowledge-based economy. These countries knew that having a well educated workforce was critical to building a strong economy, and even back then, they were working to reform education in ways that made sense for their future. For them, **it wasn't about tailoring the system; it was about changing the system**. Today, those same nations are eating our lunch.

The highest performing education systems in the world—Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, Canada, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, and Australia—consistently perform at the highest levels on international assessments such as the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* and *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*. It is worth noting they also outperform the United States on all of these international studies. We are the most industrialized nation in the world; such results don't add up.

Working at the intersection of policy and politics

Assuring *all* students graduate prepared to meet the challenges of living and working in a global economy must be a priority of this nation, and **there is no greater time to forge ahead with bold initiatives to educate our citizens**. Whether we are preparing our students for college or work, they have the right to expect that the education they receive in our public schools meets the very highest standards of quality and rigor—regardless of where they live. Geography should not represent academic destiny. **The world is changing, but our schools are not, and it is time for us to do something about it.**

In 2006, the Hunt Institute conducted a survey among influential policy makers and education leaders to determine the feasibility of starting a national dialog focused on developing a common set of standards – world class standards that would be second to none. The overwhelming response was favorable, even among individuals and organizations that some years ago had been opposed to such an undertaking.

The following year, the Hunt Institute commissioned the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academies to look objectively at the status of state standards—now the norm across the nation. **The findings concluded that the current system of standards-based reform is not working as intended.** State content standards do not provide educators with clear priorities for instruction, and state assessments have remained ineffective instruments for measuring student progress; witness the disparities in NAEP and state test scores. In addition, standards-based reform efforts have not had the desired effect on classroom instruction, and we have not yet built the political will to address disparities in educational opportunity.

Countries that excel on TIMSS have well-sequenced, focused math standards in place. This provides a strong foundation for teaching, learning, and assessment. However, the NRC found that current state content standards are repetitive and poorly sequenced from grade-to-grade. The current processes to develop state content standards are broadly inclusive – this prevents snags of opposition but yields less focused standards. And **not only do our standards suffer from a lack of focus and clarity, but the variation across states is even greater than we'd expected**—even when beginning from a common starting point such as National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

How can we expect our students to be engaged and compelled to apply themselves when we have not yet established clear goals for learning in our public schools? To share the NRC findings with governors and state leaders who can act, the Hunt Institute launched *Blueprint*, a publication that describes such research within the context of today's challenges.

Our upcoming issue will focus on key issues and resources within each system component outlined in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. **We know that standards are critical, but aren't sufficient on their own. Only a systemic approach will get us where we need to be. Standards need to be supported by an integrated system, including curriculum, assessment, instruction, teacher preparation, and professional development.** Unless our efforts reach the on-the-ground activity of teaching and learning, they will have been in vain. Standards-based reform was meant to be *systemic* reform.

The ARRA presents a unique opportunity to re-envision standards-based education as a systemic effort. States have a short timeframe to develop plans for phase two of the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund allocation and competitive grant opportunities. And states are being encouraged to work together—pooling resources and brain power.

In this unprecedented move, governors have been given a prominent leadership role in education reform—and rightfully so. Governors are in a unique position to build and push daring education agendas at a time when it's needed most. **A 21st century education governor uses the bully pulpit and political levers to solidify public support, build coalitions and position himself or herself as the driving leader.** I always challenge them to do just that.

Since 2002, the Hunt Institute has brought together governors at our *Governors Education Symposia* to arm them with ideas and strategies to promote academic achievement in their states. An added bonus is the opportunity to talk to each other about what has worked—and what hasn't. This year's *Symposium*, which we're doing in partnership with the NGA Center for Best Practices, is designed to help governors to better understand the intricacies of the ARRA and how it can work for their states.

Yes, our governors must be audacious and think unconventionally when it comes to education reform, but knowing what works helps them know what kind of investments to make. Many citizens and leaders understand that having a single set of expectations for all students is a crucial step to improving both student achievement and equity. **Content standards must form a clear, coherent message about teaching and learning in each subject area, and we must ensure that world-class content standards form the basis of every child's education.**

In 2007, the Hunt Institute began partnering with the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to explore the potential for a common set of content standards. Findings from the Hunt Institute's project with the NRC and discussions during our 2007 and 2008 *Governors Education Symposia* informed this effort. The partner organizations agreed that a common set of state standards should be fewer, clearer, and higher than our current state standards. They must be internationally benchmarked and based on *evidence* about the essential knowledge and skills that students need to be prepared for college and work.

I believe that this can be accomplished through a state-led effort that is voluntary **but that is externally validated** to ensure that we have the very best standards. I would encourage all states to participate in such an effort. But, **I would also caution states to resist the urge to expand—or otherwise dilute—them.**

Evidence from the NRC studies clearly indicates what happens when states are too inclusive. This practice leads to standards that are a mile wide and inch deep. *EdWeek* reported last month that experts are siding with **depth of knowledge versus breadth of knowledge**—especially when it comes to the sciences.

The Carnegie-IAS Commission on Mathematics and Science Education, on which I serve, is focusing on new standards and assessments in math and science that are fewer, clearer, and more rigorous. We

Working at the intersection of policy and politics

want to achieve higher levels of math and science learning for all American students and redesign schools and systems to deliver math and science learning more effectively. **Essentially, we are using math and science as a lens to look at systemic reform.**

The Commission will detail how weaving together strategies that are often treated a separate—developing fewer, more rigorous, common standards that are aligned to high-quality assessments; building teacher effectiveness; encouraging innovations at all levels throughout the education system; redesigning how curriculum is delivered—can create a unified plan for raising math and science achievement for all American students.

Assessment plays a critical role in determining what gets taught. Understanding this, the Hunt Institute is excited to once again engage the NRC in an effort to consider the status of our current tests and envision a new generation of assessments. If we could develop assessment systems that better evaluate the individual progress of students, we'd open the door for new measures of accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization. **This is a prime opportunity for states to pool their resources to develop better tools.** The benefit of such state collaboration has been demonstrated by efforts such as the *New England Common Assessment Program* (NECAP) and the shared Algebra II assessment among *American Diploma Project* states.

A recent study released by McKinsey & Company, *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*, shares key findings on the international, racial, income, and systems-based gaps facing the United States and assesses the economic impact of the economy as a whole and as individuals. The study states that such **“educational gaps impose on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession.”** Though it may seem like an uphill battle to secure a set of world-class standards and learning opportunities for every American student, it is the right thing to do.

Here's what Congress can do to promote the implementation of common standards:

- Ensure that the multi-state development of common content standards is based on empirical research and solid evidence about what our students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college and work; communicate these to the American public.
- Foster the initiation of a similar effort to address science standards; communicate the need for these to the American public.
- Sponsor the development of teacher-designed curriculum that aligns with the standards and make those available to the states.
- Support the design and implementation of high-quality, state-of-the-art assessments that reflect the newly designed content standards. Make those assessments available to all states that faithfully adopt the new content standards. These assessments should go beyond the boundaries of multiple choice and paper tests and should include opportunities for students to apply their knowledge.

- Fund the design of both formative and summative assessments that are aligned with each other. Formative assessment results must allow for quick turnaround to inform instruction.
- Fund the redesign of teacher preparation programs – both university-based and alternative programs—to prepare teachers to teach to the content standards and use the assessments to improve instruction.
- Support the creation of a national database of empirically based instructional strategies that promote high achievement for our neediest students.
- Require higher education and PK-12 systems to work together to create a seamless system.
- Fund the design of research-based models of professional development for teachers, principals and superintendents. Require that federal funding for these initiatives include rigorous evaluations.
- Stand firmly behind the Secretary of Education and the requirements of the assurances.

This is a long way from being the toughest thing America has ever had to do. Yet, I would suggest to you the risks we are facing are as great as anything we have faced in a long time. We just simply have to do it. **We must be able to compete on the global stage or we will slip into a second rate nation and I fear we will never come back.**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about this important change in American education reform. **Having a common core of internationally-benchmarked standards is essential to the future success of this nation**, and the Hunt Institute and I will continue to work to that end.

I will be happy to answer your questions.

###