

Where's the Finish Line in the Four Assurances?

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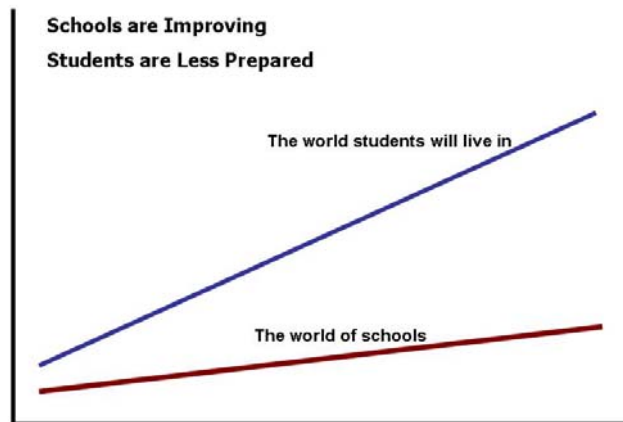
Dr. Willard R. Daggett
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Our Education System Today

Whenever I meet with education leaders lately, the impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on school change frequently comes up. Whether you are directly involved in the chase for competitive federal grants from the stimulus fund or not, the impact of these initiatives will be felt by everyone in education.

First, allow me to observe that the issues facing K-12 education today are not new. They are an extension of issues first raised in 1983 in the government report, *A Nation at Risk. No Child Left Behind* was a continuation of the ongoing attempt to address the issue of raising the academic performance of all students. The Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation (i3) funds are the latest efforts by the current administration to improve the American education system.

The good news is that most schools have improved. The bad news is that our world has been changing at a much faster pace than our schools.



Unfortunately, many of our schools have gotten better and better at doing what no longer works, because they were designed for a time that has passed. In the 20th century, attendance was mandatory but learning was optional, and we sorted and selected students based on who we thought could attain high standards of learning. Today, that approach is obsolete. We must educate all students to high standards so they can become contributing members of our technological society in a global economy.

A Different Perspective

One thing is clear. The Four Assurances that guide the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the Race to the Top (RTTF) funds will be underlying themes in all other federal education legislation, such as Perkins, IDEA and ESEA.

But if we are to move education to where it needs to be in the 21st century, the International Center believes we need to view the assurances from a different perspective.

The Four Assurances are frequently viewed from the perspective of the system and the adults who manage the system. We believe the focus — and the intent of the assurances — should be on learning and the people going through the system: the students. If we as a nation are to really make changes that will allow our students to compete in a dynamic and globally driven economy, we need to look at education from the perspective of student learning as shown in the chart that follows.

Four Assurances	Intent of the Assurance according to the International Center	
Standards	→	Student proficiency and readiness
Teacher Effectiveness	→	Effective student learning
Data Systems	→	Use of data for instructional decisions
Turn Around Schools	→	Effective leadership and increased flexibility

- The issue isn't standards, it's proficiency. ***Are students prepared for the world beyond school, which requires high levels of literacy, math and other skills of all adults?***
- The issue isn't just teacher effectiveness but ***how to make learning accessible and effective for all students.***
- The issue isn't better data systems for reporting but ***using data to make informed instructional decisions that improve learning.***
- Turning around low-performing schools is not about structures and models but **about effective leadership and increasing flexibility** — for example, getting regulations, “sacred cows,” etc. out of the way so educators can be innovative. Charter schools are an example of flexibility, which is why they are embraced by many people seeking change.

We cannot regulate learning or excellence. School improvement is not going to happen through existing rules and regulations. New rules and regulations must be written based upon the belief that all students can learn.

What Do We Do?

We must change what is negotiable and non-negotiable in our education system. What has been non-negotiable up until now is everything that involves the adults in the system. Some of those things will need to become negotiable. Providing all students a rigorous and relevant education that prepares them for the world in which they will live must be non-negotiable. To accomplish that, we must let go of policies and procedures that hinder innovation so we can create learning systems that will allow ALL students to achieve.

I will share a more detailed discussion brief very soon. I look forward to our ongoing dialogue on these matters as we work together to improve learning in our schools.



Willard R. Daggett, Ed.D., CEO of the International Center for Leadership in Education, is recognized worldwide for his proven ability to move education systems towards more rigorous and relevant skills and knowledge for *all* students. Since 1991, Dr. Daggett and the staff of the International Center have partnered with hundreds of districts and thousands of schools across the nation to help them achieve their school improvement goals.

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