

The Ball Foundation

Education Initiatives

Improving literacy achievement through whole-system change

20/20 Vision: A Strategy for Doubling America's Academic Achievement by the Year 2020 (1998)

Executive Summary

A prominent group of scholars, business leaders, educators, and policymakers challenge the nation to double student achievement in the next 20 years. The group - the Vanderbilt University based Consortium on Renewing Education (CORE) - presents a coherent, research-based improvement agenda and master strategy to help push schools to dramatically higher levels of achievement. CORE challenges the nation to cut in half the percentage of students performing at the basic level or below on examinations such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading, math, and science within two decades. The effect would be to push the bulk of American students to a world-class standard or beyond. How can we achieve this goal? The CORE agenda stresses autonomy, accountability, and action necessary to raise achievement using the \$2 billion we spend every school day. CORE's recommendations are designed to give each school and all stakeholders the motivation and the means to achieve challenging student performance goals across the nation's education system.

Focus on Schools

CORE believes the only way we can double performance is by making individual schools the primary unit of productivity and change and by providing schools with appropriate autonomy and resources to fulfill their responsibility. Schools should have authority to make their own budgeting decisions for the 75 percent of school funds spent on instruction, instructional and pupil support, and administration. This kind of budget authority is common in publicly funded, but autonomous, charter schools. The movement to greater individual autonomy for schools is supported by new research in the report that identifies the nuances of management and mission that are crucial factors in determining whether schools have the "right stuff" to succeed. Research conducted for CORE by Paul Hill of the University of Washington indicates that schools are effective when they are able to integrate human, social, political, financial, and technological resources into a coherent program of instruction for students. This "high performance management" is most evident when schools have:

- A common focus for teaching and learning that reflects basic principles of the school;
- Stable school leadership;
- Thoughtful links between school experiences and student learning;
- Authoritative stance towards attendance, decorum, and expectations;
- A no-nonsense, unapologetic intention to influence student values;
- An ability to recognize and respond when a student is failing.

Bolster Accountability

The Consortium challenges state and local officials to establish content and performance standards for all states, periodic tests, and appropriate consequences.

CORE calls for the development of high-stakes proficiency exams for student graduation and assessments for reading proficiency before students can leave 3rd grade and mathematics and algebra skills before they enter high school. Information from a broad range of performance

indicators, including value-added measures of performance, should be widely shared with the public and trigger consequences or assistance.

Successful schools should be recognized and rewarded. Struggling schools should be given help to improve. There should be predictable pressures placed on schools to succeed. Consequences for low school performance should include, sequentially, school-level improvement planning, outside assistance, reconstitution, public school choice.

However often states engage in testing, it is crucial that performance examinations reveal performance based upon the individual school. Only in this way can school leaders and practitioners be held accountable.

Currently there is little political support for a national examination and the costs of linking state tests together for comparative purposes are prohibitive. CORE urges state and local officials to work together to encourage private and national organizations to develop a national on-line computer testing system (National Internet Computer Adaptive Testing). This would allow for large scale assessments of comparative student performance in an efficient, secure, and cost-effective manner. Such a widespread test should be based on a consensus of content standards in at least English language arts and math.

Start Sooner, Finish Faster

The report contends that once students demonstrate proficiency on a high-stakes exit exam as early as 10th grade, they should be allowed to pursue higher education or career programs. Students who do not anticipate enrolling in college may choose to participate in a school-to-career program, serve an apprenticeship, or begin work at that time.

While CORE's proposal would open up high school to allow students to leave before the traditional age of graduation, it also would bring more young people to public schools for preschool as early as age 3. To maximize achievement, we believe we must provide more money for preschool and the early years of schooling when students gain the building blocks of literacy, and fewer dollars for secondary education as students exit school.

Reverse Historic Subsidy to Suburbs

Academic achievement cannot be significantly elevated unless states forcefully address the education problems of big cities. Without a strong urban focus, we write off one-quarter of the nation's children, 35 percent of low-income children, and 40 percent of minority children.

Therefore, CORE calls for the development of cooperative strategies between states and urban school districts to raise the performance of students living in poverty. For too long, public policy has instead subsidized suburbia, making it easier for people to leave urban centers.

The departure of the middle class deprived remaining students of another force of academic achievement, the human capital of middle-class students from whom economically poor students could learn. Middle-class departure also deprived schools of a large constituency to advocate academic improvement.

Cooperative arrangements might include granting waivers to state regulations, soliciting support from foundations and the business community, conducting special data collection and analysis in support of city reform efforts, and ensuring that cities receive special allocations of state-authorized charter school slots.

Build School Capacity

The quality of the nation's public schools chiefly depends on the competence of the teachers and principals who staff them; the commitment of students, parents, and communities who animate them; the adequacy and judicious use of dollars that support them; and the prudent application of emerging technologies that enlarge them. Together these human, social, financial, and technological resources comprise a school's capacity to promote student learning.

Today, however, few schools possess these resources in sufficient supply to succeed in the performance-oriented educational systems that states and districts are moving to adopt. The largest and most comprehensive section of the CORE report focuses on improvements in seven areas.

1. **Prepare stronger leaders.** CORE urges states to adopt new standards for principal licensure and help principals and administrators gain the knowledge and skills they need to be instructional leaders.
2. **Improve teaching.** Because good teaching makes a difference, CORE calls on state and local leaders to support improvement by raising requirements for teacher education and licensure and by supporting National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.
3. **Prepare students to learn.** Besides enabling public schools to offer year-round preschool programs to all children starting at age three, CORE calls on local and state leaders to petition Congress to increase Head Start funding to permit all eligible children to participate. Currently only two-thirds of students eligible for Head Start participate in the program.
4. **Engage students and parents.** States can take strategic steps toward realigning school-home linkages in ways that complement rather than detract from student effort. The Consortium recommends making school facilities available for after-school enrichment and limiting student academic-year employment to 20 hours per week. CORE also urges states to support school programs and activities to inform parents about school goals and expectations and to involve them in their child's learning.
5. **Allocate adequate resources.** CORE urges states to shift their focus from equity-ensuring that school districts receive about the same amount of money, regardless of what it purchases to adequacy-guaranteeing the amount of resources needed to provide a sound education for all students. CORE offers state officials suggestions for defining what 'adequate' education entails and urges that they redesign finance systems to ensure adequacy. CORE urges state and local leaders to petition the federal government to allocate block grants to states to ensure that all students are guaranteed an adequate education. Individual schools also need authority to manage their own budgets.
6. **Utilize technology effectively.** CORE calls on states to require teachers and principals to demonstrate their competence in technology in order to be certified and to provide them with training opportunities to develop their technology skills. The Consortium also urges states to expand content-based educational opportunities for students by introducing Advanced Placement and other courses on-line.
7. **Ensure timely access to data.** Further we call on policymakers to ensure that schools and districts have the technological capacity to transmit records and test results quickly so that this information can be used to improve instruction.

Compare, Compete, Cooperate

Doubling academic achievement requires an implementation strategy that includes comparative analyses, interstate alliances, and research supporting pursuit of achievement. The report urges state leaders to develop an Interstate Alliance for Academic Achievement to help states expand and coordinate development of resources, create a foundation for scaling up reform success and ensure that the nation benefits from the efforts of individual states. CORE also urges increased investment in

education research. Currently, education consumes about 7 percent of Gross Domestic Product, but funding for research is only about 0.08 percent of expenditures, an amount that is minuscule compared to research funding for other fields.

Cost of Improvements

If current funding patterns hold, the improvements CORE calls for can be accomplished with little added investment beyond the incremental dollars required to educate a growing school-age population. The cost of expanding the school day to a "full day" will be more than \$30 billion, some of which can be minimized by outsourcing much of the supervision during the non-instructional day; shifting funds for health, welfare, and recreation activities; and by reimbursements for parents. Parents now pay substantial amounts for preschool and after-school care, some of which they could transfer to the public sector.

The infrastructure and maintenance costs for Internet testing purposes are estimated to total \$5 billion to \$7 billion annually for about a decade of startup, some of which can be offset by private investment.

The estimated additional cost of bringing school funding to an adequate level would be \$22.3 billion, which represents less than 9 percent of current state and local education spending, or 108 percent of total federal education spending.

When all the CORE recommendations are operating fully, total added annual costs could total up to \$67 billion. But the report argues that these costs can still be met by refocusing new funding required to handle the education of a growing population.

If the education system continues to average the 1 percent annual revenue growth, net inflation and enrollment gains that have characterized it for the past five decades, by 2020 total spending would be \$75 billion more than today, or about \$445 billion. New revenues should be invested in doubling achievement. New resources must be redirected to help provide for early childhood education, help states ensure adequate financial support, and pay special attention to, the needs of urban schools.

Comprehensive Agenda

No state has implemented the comprehensive package CORE proposes, despite the negligible cost. Our best chance to double achievement is not by waving the magic wands of school choice or national exams, or by trying to achieve national goals that nobody is made responsible to meet. CORE's agenda calls for states to introduce a comprehensive set of accountability measures and better ways of deploying readily available talent and resources. This approach, which builds on the best that is known from research and the progress of the past, is the fastest and most effective way we can guarantee that our schools will fulfill our expectations for student performance today and in the coming century.

The Peabody Center for Education Policy was chartered in fall 1994. As both "think tank" and service organization, the Peabody Center provides an independent vantage from which to assess education problems, issues and proposals that are of national or international import - and which carry consequences for schools and postsecondary institutions.

The Glen Ellyn, Ill.-based Ball Foundation, which supported the study, was established in 1975 by G. Carl Ball, former chairman of George J. Ball, Inc., and his wife, Vivian Elledge Ball, to help individuals and organizations discover and develop human potential. The Foundation advances basic and applied research in aptitude measurement, education

and career development. In 1995, the foundation supported the Consortium on Productivity in the Schools and its final report, *Using What We Have to Get the Schools We Need*.

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