

The Search for Quality Education  
The National Core Curriculum:  
What Taught, What Not, Teacher Evaluation  
Jerrilee K. Mosier  
Quest Club

## Preface

I planned to work on the paper at my parents' while there for an extended holiday, celebrating Christmas, my parents' 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and my niece, Natalie's wedding. I am fortunate that I grew up in a family where we discussed many of the social and political issues of the day as a part of our meal time conversation. It is through these conversations that I was pointed to several references in this paper. My father had one of his textbooks from his doctoral studies that was invaluable in highlighting the larger historical context of educational quality discussions over the last three thousand years. He also has over 35 years of experience as a teacher, high school administrator, school district superintendent and community college president to draw on within our discussion. My brother Rick, an attorney, who has been a member and is currently president of the local school board pointed me in the direction of the Blueberry Principle and Jamie Vollmer. He was passionate regarding the reforms that were being asked of public education and the amount of money that gone to private enterprise in the name of reform. My cousin, Cyndie, a kindergarten teacher and half time librarian in a small town in Kansas lent me her opinion regarding the needs for standards, as well as, I believe, a fairly objective viewpoint as to how the common core could assist students and teachers. One of her points is clearly identified on the Common Core State Standards website, as a rationale for implementation, but she provided a real student example to me in our conversation. One thing was perfectly clear in each one of these discussions, as it was when I read through the plethora of websites, newspaper articles, and other references associated with this topic, people are passionate about their opinions regarding what the common core does or does not provide in regards to a quality education. They have strong convictions on what a quality education should look like and the traits and abilities that students should have to live and work within our society,

or maybe, it isn't so much about the quality education discussion, as it is about making the education of their children a personal decision or is it all about the money and the politics. I will let you decide.

### The Search for Quality Education

#### The National Core Curriculum: What Taught, What Not, Teacher Evaluation

The search for quality education conversation is not a new one. The definition and the characteristics of a quality education has been debated since the days of Greek and Roman Antiquity. In Paul Shorey's translation of Plato's "Republic", by Harvard University Press, Plato articulates the importance of logical reasoning, mathematics and astronomy in education, as well as, the importance of physical education/gymnastics and music. He also speaks to the importance of educational standards, in his conversation with Socrates. This discussion is translated as follows:

"And shall we not begin education in music earlier than gymnastics?"

"Of course", says Socrates.

"And under music, you include tales, do you not?"

"I do", Socrates admits.

"And the tales are of two species, the one true and the other false?"

"Shall we then, thus lightly suffer our children to listen to any chance stories fashioned by chance teachers and to so take into their minds opinions for the most part contrary to those that we shall think desirable to them to hold when they grow up? We must begin, then it seems by a censorship of our story makers and what they do well, we must pass and what not reject."

He went on to say, "now all of this study must be presented to them while they are still young, not in the form compulsory instruction."

"Why so?", Socrates.

"A free soul ought not to pursue any study slavishly; for while bodily labors performed under constraint do not harm the body, nothing that is learned under compulsion stays with the mind"

(Shorey, 1930-1935). Can't you imagine a similar conversation taking place today around a table in the teacher's break room, a school board meeting, or at a coffee shop?

Aristotle provides another example of the historical context of the search for a quality education. In the translation of Aristotle's "Politics", by H. Rackham, he states that "it is clear that there should be legislation about education and it should be conducted on a public system but that consideration must be given to the question as to what constitutes education and what is the proper way to be educated." He goes on to say, "at present there are differences of opinion as to the proper tasks to be set; for all peoples do not agree as to the things that the young ought to learn, either with a virtue or with a view to the best life, nor is it clear whether their studies should be regulated more with regard to intellect or with regard to character" (Rackham, 1932).

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century educational theory was ahead of actual practice in three areas:

1. Encouragement is better means of motivating students than punishment.
2. Character is of higher value than book learning
3. Educational programs will be effective only to the degree to which they are adequate to the individual child (Ulich, 1959).

John Locke's writings in "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" summarized the curriculum that he recommended in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century including English, French, Latin, geography, arithmetic, geometry, chronology, history, civil law, English Law, rhetoric, logic, as well as, style and letters (Ulich, 1959). Then there is John Dewey, one of the most significant educational thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He believed that "the school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bring the child to share in

the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own power for social ends” (Dewey, 1959).

Dewey’s concept of education put a premium on meaningful activity in learning. He argued that the curriculum should be relevant to student’s lives. He saw learning by doing and the development of practical skills as crucial to children’s education. To Dewey, the central ethical imperative in education was democracy. Problem –Based Learning (PBL) incorporates Dewey’s ideas pertaining to learning through active inquiry. Many opponents of the Common Core are attributing its development to Dewey and his progressive educational philosophies.

In a timeline that is posted on the Indiana State Impact website, regarding the Common Core, critical dates leading up to the 2010 release and subsequent adoption of the Common Core State Standards are listed (Bloom, 2012). The timeline begins with a commission report, issued in 1983, under the Regan Administration called “A Nation At Risk.” “This report calls for setting standards for what a student should know and be able to do and marks the starting point of “standards-based” education reform. The movement also calls for monitoring whether students are learning through standardized tests. In the following years, states moved to adopt standards, pushed along by federal legislation. Teachers groups also published model standards of their own.” Under President Clinton’s Administration a series of laws (Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the Improving America’s Schools Act - 1994) required states to set standards and corresponding tests.

At the 1996 National Education Summit, governors and business leaders pledged to work together to raise standards and achievement in public schools. Achieve, a non-profit, non-partisan group which will become instrumental in the creation of the Common Core, was founded. *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLBA), was passed by Congress in 2001 and signed by President Bush in 2002. This law strengthened the requirements for the kinds of standards states

must set and requires states to test every student in grades 3-8 every year; and by 2014, said the law, every child must be “proficient” or schools face escalating sanctions. The ultimate sanction for failure to raise test scores was firing staff and closing the school. However, states are still free to set their own standards and create their own tests. The qualifier for the NCLBA was that all students should be “college and career ready” by the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

It was in 2008 that the **National Governors Association**, an organization of governors, their head staff members and policy makers, The Council of Chief State School Officials which includes state education commissioners and other groups, such as Achieve, began organizing the development of common standards in math and English language arts for grades K-12. Prior to their release Governors and state education commissioners from 48 states plus the District of Columbia committed to developing the Common Core Standards.

The Common Core State Standards consist of two sets of K-12 academic standards that outline what students are expected to learn in English, Language Arts, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening, language arts integrated with media technology and mathematics each year from kindergarten through high school. They establish a ‘staircase’ of increasing complexity in what students must be able to do, so that all students are “college and career ready”, as stated in the mission statement of the Common Core Standards State Initiative (Initiative, 2012).

In English language arts, the Common Core State Standards require the following: classic myths and stories from around the world; America’s Founding Document; Founding American Literature; and Shakespeare. The other decisions regarding what should be taught are left to state and local determination, as along as “students systemically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Initiative, 2012).

In Mathematics, the Common Core State Standards require students to have a foundation in: whole numbers; addition; subtraction; multiplication; division; fractions; and decimals. The Common Core State Standards state that “taken together, these elements support a student’s ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standard call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges” (Initiative, 2012). Thus, students are prepared to think and reason mathematically.

The Common Core State Standards focus on the conceptual understanding and procedures starting in the early grades, thus proposing that they would enable “teachers the time needed to teach core concepts and procedures well and give students the opportunity to master them.” The Common Core State Standards Initiative’s mission, according to its website, is as follows: “The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be positioned to compete successfully in the global economy” (Initiative, 2012).

The Common Core Frequently Asked Questions Section on their website also highlights: “The Common Core State Standards were written by building on the best and highest state standards in existence in the U.S., examining the expectations of other high performing countries around the world, and careful study of the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college and careers. The standards are evidenced-based, aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and are



informed by other top performing countries. They were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country so they are realistic and practical for the classroom” (Initiative, 2012). There is considerable disagreement regarding whether the process of development was as inclusive as the former statement implies.

Within two months of the release of the Common Core Standards, on June 2, 2010, twenty-eight states adopted the standards and promised to implement fully by fall of 2013. The adoption of the Common Core Standards, met that the current assessment used by the states would be replaced by tests that were aligned with the common core by the 2014-2015 school year. By the end of 2010, a total of forty-one states, and the District of Columbia had agreed to implement the Common Core Standards. Currently forty-six states, 4 territories, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education have adopted the Common Core Standards. Although, Minnesota has adopted only the English Language Arts Standards and have kept their own mathematics state standards. Our own State of Indiana was one of the first twenty-eight states to adopt the standards in August, 2010, as was my home State of Oklahoma. Currently, the states that have not fully adopted the Common Core Standards include Texas, Alaska, Nebraska, and Virginia. Each of these states have received NCLBA waivers, which indicate that their state content standards are aligned for students to be “college and career ready” as defined by the NCLBA.

It is difficult to disagree on the need for standards. Every professional has standards by which they must comply and that provide the conditions and criteria for accreditation and certification. Prior to the Common Core State Standards, each state had their own curriculum standards. One of the arguments for the adoption and implementation of the common core standards is that it will increase the ability of families to move from one state to another without

interrupting their child's education. However, the main force behind the Common Core was not the Standards themselves, but the belief that a nationalized, uniform system is the best method of education. It was a culmination of a movement that had been building in the United States for the past decade. The Standards are to provide clarity and consistency in what is expected of students learning across the country, helping to provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education, regardless of where they live.

The Common Core State Standards were voluntarily adopted by the states, although states accepted it through promises of race to the top grants. Two consortiums of states received \$360 million in the Federal Stimulus package to develop new standardized tests tied to the Common Core Standards. Each state is different, but in many cases state house and senate education committees heard testimony about the Common Core and reviewed the Standards prior to implementation.

Although both Indiana and Oklahoma were two the first states to adopt the Common Core State Standards, both states are currently on pause as to further implementation. In Indiana, concern regarding the new standards started gaining traction during the 2013 legislative session. Republican Senator, Scott Schneider filled a bill to withdraw Indiana from the new standards. Although this proposal was scaled back, opponents of the Common Core Standards were able to convince the legislators to pause implementation pending a legislative review. The Indiana State Board of Education has until July 1, 2014 to make a final decision on the whether Indiana will follow the Common Core Standards. Kindergarten and first grade teachers were already using the Common Core Standards for their classrooms. Second grade teachers were to join them in 2013-14. But because the implementation is on pause, there is also a delay in the rollout of the new assessments, which leaves ISTEP in place for another year. In addition, the Department of

Education has asked second grade teachers to teach the old Indiana standards, along with the Common Core Standards. This action will prepare the students to take the ISTEP tests as third graders.

Governor Pence's strongest message yet is that Indiana would drop the Common Core in his State of the State address on Tuesday, January 14th, 2014. Governor Pence referred to "a time-out on national education standards." The state has been undertaking a review of the standards during the "pause." He stated, "When it comes to setting standards for schools, I can assure you, Indiana's will be uncommonly high. They will be written by Hoosiers, for Hoosiers, and will be among the best in the nation," Pence said. "Hoosiers have high expectations when it comes to Indiana schools. That's why Indiana decided to take a time-out on national education standards." However, this final decision on whether Indiana will move forward with the Common Core Standards and their related assessments may also be on pause for another year if the bill Senator Luke Kenley has filed in the state legislature passes. It would put off the state board of education's decision about the common core until July 1, 2015. The bill also states that for school years beginning after June 30, 2016, the state education department would be required "to administer either the ISTEP assessment or a comparable assessment program that is aligned with the educational standards adopted by the state board."

We are not alone in "pausing" our adoption of the Common Core State Standards. So far, none of the forty-five states that adopted the English and math standards have dropped them. But several states have backed off from using the assessments created by the two multi-state testing groups or ended their participation in the collaborations. A few of the other states that have either paused or are reconsidering movement forward with the Common Core Standards

Assessments are Oklahoma, South Carolina, Kansas, and Tennessee. Although, even as I stand before you, this number is a moving target.

Jane Robbins of the *American Principles Project*, a social conservative group who opposes the common core, says Pence's call for the state developing its own standards is the result of a strong grassroots effort. She said, "The grassroots there have been just extraordinary. They have had so much participation all over the state by a lot of different groups, parents and grandparents and generally citizens who are just concerned about the state of education in Indiana, and they built the political pressure to an enormous level." She says what's happening in Indiana is an indication that Common Core is in trouble nationwide. "If Indiana gets out, and more states start to pull out – and states are already pulling out of the testing that goes with it – it's just a house of cards," she says. "And it doesn't take too many cards being pulled out, before the whole thing tumbles down" (Kellogg, 2014).

"Hoosiers against the Common Core" suggest a solution for Indiana is to follow the lead of Nebraska, Texas, Alaska and Virginia in submitting for a waiver for the NCLBA. They suggest submitting the Indiana 2009 math standards that were never implemented, although they were adopted by the State Board of Education and to revert back to the 2008 English standards that were rated superior to the Common Core State Standards to the federal government to be evaluated as "college and career ready standards." If Indiana withdraws from the Common Core, we are likely to end up with very similar standards. That is because, just as the 4 states that did not adopt the Common Core, Nebraska, Texas, Virginia, Alaska and Minnesota, Indiana must maintain college and career ready standards or we will not be in compliance with the NCLBA waiver (Core, 2013).

### **Standards VS Assessment**

The current issue, and one of the most volatile, with the Common Core, are not so much the standards themselves, but the testing and assessments that are being developed and the data that will be generated thereafter in a recommended national database. Integral to the Common Core was the expectation that students would be tested on computers, using online standardized exams as in accordance with the NCLBA. The latter's legislation began the required assessment of students in grades 3-8 and once in high school. As most of you know, Indiana's test is called ISTEP. The Common Core tests are to "break new ground" regarding assessment. From the beginning, Smarter Balanced and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), the two consortia which received \$380 million in the stimulus package, have promised smarter tests that will evaluate how well students apply knowledge. Instead of multiple-choice questions, for example, students might be given "performance tasks," or groups of test questions designed around a common theme and built to assess more complex skills.

The adoption and implementation of the assessments are critical to the larger mission of the standards: to increase academic rigor for all students and to allow states to better evaluate their students and compare them to those in other states. But as controversy over the Common Core has challenged some states' commitment to the standards, a number of states have decided to withdraw from PARCC or Smarter Balanced or to use alternative tests, raising questions about the cost of the tests and the long-term viability of the multistate testing groups. The federal grants will end this fall, and it is unclear whether the testing groups will continue past that point.

Controversy over the Common Core heated up last year across the country. Critics from both ends of the political spectrum cited a variety of complaints, including the fear of federal control over education, questions about whether Common Core is superior to previous state

standards and worries about the implementation of the standards, including the cost to states and school districts.

The following information was taken from The Pew Charitable Trusts website called Stateline (Lu, 2014). The new testing instruments will be used in those states that are continuing with the assessment and implementation of the common core standards starting in March, 2014 and will serve as a dry run for the two groups of states that have banded together to develop Common Core tests, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). In most states, the real Common Core tests will begin in 2015.

At this point, the only direct competitor with PARCC and Smarter Balanced Assessment is ACT, the most widely known for the college admissions test. ACT will be launching its Aspire testing system in the spring of 2014. It is the only test maker that has announced a Common Core aligned test that can be used by multiple states. States also have the option of contracting with vendors for the development of state specific tests. In December, Kansas withdrew from the Smarter Balanced coalition, opting instead to commission tests from the University of Kansas. Earlier this month, Alaska also announced it would withdraw from Smarter Balanced and instead use tests from the University of Kansas. In September, Florida Gov. Rick Scott, ordered the state's education department to withdraw from PARCC and consider other test options. Utah withdrew from Smarter Balanced in 2012. Georgia and Oklahoma withdrew from PARCC last summer. Alabama, which had been a member of both Smarter Balanced and PARCC, withdrew from both groups; Pennsylvania has said it will use its own tests.

Indiana State Board of Education has until July 1, 2014 to indicate which assessment venue we will take. Governor Pence withdrew Indiana from the PARCC Consortium effective August 12, 2013. The fiscal impact study of Indiana Common Core Implementation was done by the Indiana Office of Management and Budget in August, 2013. The study outlines the costs of adopting one or the other of the two consortia assessments mentioned, i.e., Smarter Balanced or PARCC, developing our own assessments aligned with the common core standards, or developing our own assessments that common core independent. Some of the states have expressed concerns about the cost of the tests. PARCC has estimated its test will cost \$29.50 per student – about the median its member states now pay for standardized tests; Smarter Balanced has estimated its test will cost \$22.50 per student for the end-of-year exam and \$27.30 per student including mid-year exams, less than current standardized test costs in two-thirds of the member states. The estimate for Indiana, as analyzed by Indiana Office of Budget and Management indicates that for the implementation of PARCC for the 2014-2015 would be an additional \$23.3 million over what we currently pay for ISTEP (\$34.1 million). Over the next four years, until 2018-2019, the estimated total costs for PARCC and ISTEP together would be \$39-\$33 million each year (Timmerman, Pattison, & Stovir, 2013).

Jacqueline E. King, a spokeswoman for Smarter Balanced, said that in addition to end-of-the-year exams, Smarter Balanced will offer a package of materials including ways to assess student learning throughout the school year, along with extensive resources for teachers, such as model lesson plans. David Connerty-Marin, a spokesman for PARCC, said the group's tests will have several advantages over most current state standardized tests. They will, for example, make it easier to evaluate students who are significantly above or below grade level. They also will evaluate reading and writing scores at every grade (currently, few states test writing at every

grade level) and gauge whether students are on track to be "college ready" when they graduate from high school.

Some argue policymakers should take a step back and reconsider the larger question of why we test students at all, which will in turn drive changes to the tests. Historically, most state standardized tests have focused on the knowledge and skills that are relatively simple to test and don't reflect a great depth of learning, said James Pellegrino, co-director of Learning Sciences Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a leading expert on student assessment. States that try to cut the cost of tests too much could pay the price, Pellegrino warned. "If we have shallow tests because we're trying to economize, teachers will respond to the test because they're held accountable for performance on the test," Pellegrino said.

This was encouraged with NCLBA because "the stakes were so high" regarding teacher and school evaluation said Diane Rativitch, in her speech to the Modern Language Association on January 11th, 2014 and was reprinted in the Washington Post on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014 (Rativitch, 2014).

Diane Rativitch, has a Ph.D. from Columbia, is a research professor at New York University, served as assistant secretary of education under George H.W. Bush, and was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the National Assessment governing Board went on to say, "What advocates ignored is that test scores are heavily influenced by socioeconomic status. Standardized tests are normed on a bell curve. The upper half of the curve has an abundance of those who grew up in favorable circumstances, with educated parents, books in the home, regular medical care, and well-resourced schools. Those who dominate the bottom half of the bell curve are the kids who lack those advantages, whose parents lack basic economic security, whose schools are over-crowded and under-resourced. To expect tougher standards and a renewed



emphasis on standardized testing to reduce poverty and inequality is to expect what never was and never will be” (Rativitch, 2014, p. 4).

She suggests that “the Common Core Standards should be decoupled from standardized testing, especially on-line testing. Most objections to the standards are caused by the testing. The tests are too long, and many students give up; the passing marks on the tests were set so high as to create failure. Yet, the test scores will be used to rate students, teachers and schools. No other nation- at least no high performing nation-judges the quality of teachers by the test scores of students. Most researchers agree that this methodology is fundamentally flawed, that it inaccurate, unreliable and unstable, that the highest ratings will go to teachers with the most affluent students and the lowest ratings will go to teachers of English learners, teachers of students with disabilities and teachers in high poverty schools” (Rativitch, 2014, p. 8).

Pellegrino, co-authored a policy statement by the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education urging "a fundamental shift in thinking about the purposes of assessment" (Lu, 2014). "Many of us believe we need to rethink some of this – it's not that we don't need to use assessments to monitor how well students are learning, but most of that should be targeted at the classroom level for supporting the teaching and learning process and not be so much a part of a high-stakes accountability system," Pellegrino said (Lu, 2014). Or as a superintendent in one of Northeast Indiana School Corporations articulated, “using assessments as they are prescribed is like putting a saddle on a Model T.”

### **Standards VS Curriculum**

So let’s return to the initial context of the topic I was given: The Search for Quality Education and the National Core Curriculum. The question is how do the Common Core Standards lead to the perception and/or implementation of a National Core Curriculum? In order

to implement the Common Core State Standards, school officials recognized the need for massive curriculum changes. In a survey administered by the Council of Chief School Superintendent Officials (CCSSO), one of the authors of the Common Core Standards, 64% of the school officials indicated that their states would need completely new or significantly revised math curriculum in order to implement the Common Core Standards. Fifty-six percent said that their English Language Arts Curriculum would also need to be new or significantly revised. The implementation instructions for the states, written by the authors of the Common Core State Standards, suggest that a national curriculum is (was) the goal of the Standards. The National Governor's Association recommended that "states and districts share the costs of developing new curricula and instructional tools, and not each develop their own at greater expense for each" (Initiative, 2012). The Math Standards specifically state, "These standards do not dictate curriculum or teaching methods." The English and Language Arts Standards are frequently mentioned for their controversial reading lists which those against the Common Core reference as "required reading material." However the Standards themselves say, "They expressly do not represent a partial or complete reading list" (Initiative, 2012).

The 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of the Common Core website specifically reiterates that standards are not curricula. "The standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the child" (Initiative, 2012). The Introduction to the Common Core Standards says "while the standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can be or should be taught. A great deal is left to the discretion of teachers and curriculum developers. The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, not to set

out an exhaustive list or a set of restrictions that limits what can be taught beyond what is specified herein” (Initiative, 2012).

AS of 2012, twenty nine states have developed new curriculum aligned to the Common Core Standards. Curriculum sharing based on the Common Core State Standards has been laid by a collaboration among a group of states and private organizations. In an effort funded by the Gates Foundation, the states of New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Colorado have started creating an open-source platform that will allow the teachers to download and share resources aligned to the Common Core Standards. The platform should be available to all states in 2014.

The fiscal impact study of Indiana Common Core Implementation was done by the Indiana Office of Management and Budget in August, 2013 also included information regarding the amount of curriculum development that has been done in Indiana to meet the Common Core Standards: “School Officials reported spending significant time finding or creating instructional materials that met the ICCS, (Indiana Common Core Standards) and the goals of the school corporation. Several educators commented that the ICCS were similar enough to Indiana’s previous standards that most existing curricular materials could be reused with minor modifications to better align with the ICCS. Furthermore, many school officials noted that if ICCS has been implemented in one year, rather than over the course of several years, the local school corporations would have seen significant increases in costs. Thus, the multi-year phase-in of the ICCS has reduced local costs over time” (Timmerman, Pattison, & Stovir, 2013, p. 16). So, it seems that in Indiana there is not an issue with developing curriculum that will align to the Common Core State Standards and that in fact, the costs of the alignment have been absorbed as a part of the evolution and operating cost of the school corporations over time.

### Conclusion

So the question still remains, where we are in our search for quality education. UNICEF developed a working paper in 2000, titled *Defining Quality in Education*, which highlights the “understanding of education as a complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context”, where five different dimensions of a quality education are described (UNICEF Education Section, 2000). They include:

- Learners are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and are supported in learning by their families and their communities
- Environments that are healthy, safe, and gender-sensitive and provide adequate resources and facilities.
- Content that is reflected in relevant curriculum and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and the knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-mannered classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, and attitudes and are linked to national goals for educations and positive participation in society.

We all may argue regarding some of the elements that were cited above and whether they are elements of a quality education. The research is however is clear: Teacher quality affects student learning more than any other school based variable (issues, such as income level and parental education levels are external, but they matter). The impact of student achievement on

economic competitiveness is equally clear. This is what led to the state and national concerns regarding quality education. Martin Schram, a Washington journalist, in the Sunday, January 26, 2014 Journal Gazette, wrote an opinion piece stating that “a better education is an issue of national security.” These are the factors that led to the legislation of No Child Left Behind Act, the development of the Common Core State Standards and the related testing, and Race to the Top grants. But legislation alone cannot make the change. As Schram stated in his opinion piece, “We, the people will never be able to form a more perfect union until we rethink our cultural and fiscal education priorities” (Schram, 2014).

This leads me to the website I mentioned in my introduction that my brother Rick encouraged me to review. Jaime Vollmer, as per his biography, is not a professional educator. He became involved with school reform after careers in law and in manufacturing. He worked with a firm for the former United States Congressman William Cramer until 1985 when he relocated to Iowa to become Director of Franchise operations for the Great Midwestern Ice Cream Company. The company was proclaimed by People magazine to make the “Best Ice Cream in America.” In 1988, he was invited to serve on a nationally recognized Iowa Business and Education Roundtable. After two years as a volunteer, he changed careers and became the Roundtable’s Executive Director (Vollmer, 2014).

He has written several books entitled, “The Ever Increasing Burden on America’s Public Schools” and “Schools Cannot Do It Alone” that highlights what we are asking of our public schools is unrealistic, that they are under attack and they are not a business. He sees the problems that we have with public education, as a systems problem, not a people problem and one that requires communities to engage in the conversation (Vollmer, 2014). Others agree with him. “They (Common Core State Standards) arrive at a time when American public education

and its teachers are under attack. Never have the public schools been subject to such upheaval, assault, and chaos as they are today. Unlike modern corporations, which extol creative disruption, schools need stability, not constant turnover and change. Yet, for the past dozen years, ill-advised federal and state policies have rained down on students, teachers, principals and schools” (Rativitch, 2014).

I would like to add that just this week, the front page of the Journal Gazette, highlighted the one of more pressing problems facing our public schools is funding. Funding in the form of vouchers for private schools and charter schools, many that do not meet the many rules and regulations that are placed upon our public schools. If you missed the article, Krista Stockman, FWCS Spokesperson said that “Ultimately, that’s 16 million taken from our schools here” (Crothers, 2014). Statewide the cost to public schools was \$81 million.

With this information, I would like to share the story that Mr. Vollmer has shared with thousands and I would like to leave it for your consideration within the context of the search for a quality education. The Blueberry Story. “If I ran my business the way you people operate your schools, I wouldn’t be in business very long!”

“I stood before an auditorium filled with outraged teachers who were becoming angrier by the minute. My speech had entirely consumed their precious 90 minutes of in-service. Their initial icy glares had turned to restless agitation. You could cut the hostility with a knife. I represented a group of business people dedicated to improving public schools. I was an executive at an ice cream company that had become famous in the middle 1980s when People magazine chose our blueberry as the “Best Ice Cream in America.”

I was convinced of two things. First, public schools needed to change; they were archaic selecting and sorting mechanisms designed for the industrial age and out of step with the needs of our emerging “knowledge society.” Second, educators were a major part of the problem: they resisted change, hunkered down in their feathered nests, protected by tenure, and shielded by a bureaucratic monopoly. They needed to look to business. We knew how to produce quality. Zero defects! TQM! Continuous improvement!

In retrospect, the speech was perfectly balanced — equal parts ignorance and arrogance. As soon as I finished, a woman’s hand shot up. She appeared polite, pleasant. She was, in fact, a razor-edged, veteran, high school English teacher who had been waiting to unload. She began quietly, “We are told, sir, that you manage a company that makes good ice cream.”

I smugly replied, “Best ice cream in America, Ma’am.”

“How nice,” she said. “Is it rich and smooth?”

“Sixteen percent butterfat,” I crowed.

“Premium ingredients?” she inquired.

“Super-premium! Nothing but triple A.” I was on a roll. I never saw the next line coming.

“Mr. Vollmer,” she said, leaning forward with a wicked eyebrow raised to the sky, “when you are standing on your receiving dock and you see an inferior shipment of blueberries arrive, what you do?” In the silence of that room, I could hear the trap snap.... I was dead meat, but I wasn’t going to lie.

“I send them back.”

She jumped to her feet. “That’s right!” she barked, “and we can never send back our blueberries. We take them big, small, rich, poor, gifted, exceptional, abused, frightened,

confident, homeless, rude, and brilliant. We take them with ADHD, junior rheumatoid arthritis, and English as their second language. We take them all! Every one! And that, Mr. Vollmer, is why it's not a business. It's school!" In an explosion, all 290 teachers, principals, bus drivers, aides, custodians, and secretaries jumped to their feet and yelled, "Yeah! Blueberries! Blueberries!"

And so began my long transformation. Since then, I have visited hundreds of schools. I have learned that a school is not a business. Schools are unable to control the quality of their raw material, they are dependent upon the vagaries of politics for a reliable revenue stream, and they are constantly mauled by a howling horde of disparate, competing customer groups that would send the best CEO screaming into the night.

None of this negates the need for change. We must change what, when, and how we teach to give all children maximum opportunity to thrive in a post-industrial society. But educators cannot do this alone; these changes can occur only with the understanding, trust, permission, and active support of the surrounding community. For the most important thing I have learned is that schools reflect the attitudes, beliefs and health of the communities they serve, and therefore, to improve public education means more than changing our schools, it means changing America" (Vollmer, 2014).



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