

Recommendations from selected reform reports show common themes.

Comparison of Recommendations from Selected Education Reform Reports*

by K. Forbis Jordan

Recommendations for improving American public elementary and secondary education have become a matter of public discussion since the release of the report from the Secretary of Education's National Commission on Excellence in Education. Interest has increased with reports from the Twentieth Century Fund and the Education Commission of the States. At least 30 reports of various types have been completed or are underway. They include data gathering on the shortage of mathematics and science teachers, research studies of schools and students, proposals for curricular reform, and finally comprehensive proposals relating to educational programs and teachers.

In terms of information about high school students, "High School and Beyond," an ongoing study by James Coleman, focuses on educational processes and outcomes and includes a sample of 58,000 students from 1,000 public and private high schools. John Goodlad's "A Study of Schooling" is based on extensive site visits and longitudinal data from 1,000 classrooms. TheodoreSizer is completing "A Study of High Schools" for the National Association of Secondary School Principals; this study involves extensive observation gained by field visits to 65 high schools. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is completing an extensive study of 15 exemplary high schools and also is utilizing data from "High School and Beyond" and "A Study of Schooling" in arriving at its recommendations. The College Entrance Examination Board has completed a project designed to identify the academic competencies needed for success in college. The National Science Foundation also is scheduled to release a series of recommendations for improving precollege science and mathematics programs. Mortimer Adler's "Paideia Proposal" calls for a dramatic

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revision of the high school curriculum with greater attention to academic rigor and substance.

Even though the reports appear to be directed at both elementary and secondary schools, most of the attention has been given to recommendations for changes in the high schools. Little attention has been given to changes needed in elementary schools so that they can provide the type of educational experiences needed by students to succeed in the "new" high schools.

The three most comprehensive reports with policy implications for the manner in which schools are conducted have come from Secretary of Education Bell's National Commission on Excellence in Education, the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, and the Education Commission of the States' Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. Each report has been sponsored by a different organization and appears to have a slightly different orientation. For example, the primary focus of the Excellence Commission's report is on recommendations for secondary schools. The Twentieth Century Fund report focuses more on the concerns about education in urban areas, and the recommendations principally call for federal actions. The recommendations in the report from the Education Commission of the States have a broader focus and appear to be oriented toward the economic needs of the nation.

Rather than being based on new field studies or a detailed analysis of a research data base, the three reports tended to rely upon available research data and expert testimony in arriving at their observations and recommendations. The Excellence Commission was appointed by Secretary of Education Terrell Bell and consisted of 18 members, with 6 from higher education and 4 from elementary and secondary education institutions or organizations. The Twentieth Century Fund consisted of 12 members with 10 from higher education, but the previous responsibilities of these persons varied considerably. The Education Commission of the States' Task Force on Education for Economic Growth had 41 members, including 14 business leaders, 13 governors, and 6 educators.

In terms of the intended audience, the Excellence Commission was oriented to the president and the citizens of the nation. The Twentieth Century Fund was focused on the federal role and had a heavy urban emphasis. The target of the report from the Education Commission of the States was the business community and state and local public officials with responsibilities for schools.

Certain common themes exist among the three reports. One is the attention given to recommendations about the curriculum in the schools. Others are related to time spent in school, expectations of performance and responses from students, and programs for special populations. One common recommendation that has received most attention is the concept of the master teacher or career ladders for teachers, commonly referred to as merit pay.

Rather than reviewing each of the reports in detail, in the following discussion, the recommendations of the reports have been grouped into ten major topics or areas. In some cases, a topic will be found in only one report, in others possibly two, and in a few instances all three reports. The major topics include educational program (or school curriculum); time; college entrance requirements; performance standards for students; teacher preparation, performance, and pay; leadership and management; fiscal

support; federal role; implementation; and business/education partnerships.

Efforts to implement the recommendations from the reports may encounter difficulty for a variety of reasons. Interest groups may not agree on the merits of various recommendations. Some recommendations might be implemented by reallocating current fiscal or human resources, but additional funds likely will be required to initiate other actions. Potential problem areas include the following:

1. Increases in high school graduation requirements may contribute to a conflict between groups seeking more rigorous "college prep" courses for all students and those seeking relevant offerings for the non-college-bound student.

2. The imposition of greater rigor in the school program may increase the educational problems of disadvantaged youth or may lead to increased attention being given to ways in which schooling can be individualized to accommodate the differences among students.

3. As to the "time" recommendations, implementation of the extended day likely will require additional staff or overtime pay for current staff, and the lengthened school year likely will require increases in the base salary. The counter position is that the uses made of existing time should be analyzed to determine how that time may be used more efficiently and effectively.

4. Recommendations for differential pay may face problems unless sufficient funds are provided to raise the

salaries for all teachers when the master teacher or merit pay programs are implemented.

5. Interest groups may agree with the concept of the master teacher or merit pay, but not able to agree on procedures such as what is to be evaluated, how the evaluation is to be conducted, or who is to do the evaluation.

6. Certification for persons with training in an academic area, but without pedagogical training, likely will be met with resistance so long as the supply of teachers exceeds the demand.

7. Neither the Excellence Commission nor the ECS Task Force calls for a dramatic expansion of the federal role or for large increases in federal funds, but implementation of most of the recommendations will be difficult for state and local agencies without additional funds from some source.

8. Even though the three reports have been characterized as comprehensive in the breadth of their recommendations, they do not call for a dramatic restructuring of either the schools' curriculum or the educational delivery system. In essence, the effect of most of the recommendations would be to "add to" existing activities or components of the educational enterprise.

* This article has been prepared by the author in his private capacity and does not represent the position of the Congressional Research Service.

COMPARISON OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SELECTED EDUCATION REFORM REPORTS

	The National Commission on Excellence in Education	Twentieth Century Fund Task Force	ECS* Task Force on Education for Economic Growth
CURRICULUM	<p>Significantly more time should be devoted to learning the "new basics"—English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer sciences, and for the college-bound a foreign language.</p> <p>Rigorous programs should be provided to advance students' personal, educational, and occupational goals, such as the fine and performing arts and vocational education. Elementary schools should provide a sound base in English language development and writing, computational and problem-solving skills, science, social studies, foreign language, and the arts.</p>	<p>The federal government should clearly state that the most important objective of elementary and secondary education in the United States is the development of literacy in the English language.</p>	<p>The school curriculum should be strengthened. States and communities should identify skills they expect the schools to impart.</p> <p>The academic experience should be more intense and more productive. Courses not only in mathematics and science, but also in all disciplines, must be enlivened and improved. The goal should be both richer substance and greater motivational power—elimination of "soft," non-essential courses, more enthusiastic involvement of students in learning, encouragement of mastery of skills beyond the basics, e.g., problem-solving, analysis, interpretation, and persuasive writing.</p>

* Education Commission of the States.

	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
CURRICULUM (cont.)	Foreign languages should be started in the elementary grades with 4-6 years of study.		Educators, business and labor leaders, and other interested parties should clearly identify the skills that the schools are expected to impart to students for effective employment and citizenship.
High School Graduation Requirements	All students seeking a diploma should be required to complete (a) 4 years of English, (b) 3 years of mathematics, (c) 3 years of science, (d) 3 years of social studies, and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended.	—No comparable provision—	—No comparable provision—
Course Content	(Detailed implementing recommendations are included for each subject area.)	—No comparable provision—	(A list of "Basic Skills and Competencies for Productive Employment" is contained in the Appendix.)
Proficiency in a Second Language	For the college-bound, two years of a foreign language in high school are strongly recommended.	Every American public school student should have the opportunity to acquire proficiency in a second language.	—No comparable provision—
Time	Significantly more time should be devoted to learning the "new basics." School districts and state legislatures should strongly consider 7-hour school days, as well as a 200- to 220-day school year.	—No comparable provision—	Every state should increase the duration and intensity of academic learning time. Students should be introduced earlier to such critical subjects as science. Schools should examine each school year, especially the twelfth grade, to ensure that time is not wasted.

	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
Time (cont.)	Time available for learning should be expanded through better classroom management and organization of the school day. Additional instructional time should be found to meet the needs of slow learners, the gifted, and others who need more instructional diversity than can be provided in the conventional school day and year.		Both states and localities should consider lengthening the school year and the school day by extending teachers' contracts. Learning time should be increased by establishing a wider range of learning opportunities beyond the normal school day and year.
Textbooks and Instructional Materials	Textbooks and tools of learning and teaching should be upgraded and updated to assure more rigorous content and to reflect current applications of technology, the best scholarship, and research findings.	—No comparable provision—	—No comparable provision—

Funds should be made available to develop texts for the disadvantaged, learning disabled, and gifted and talented.

Textbook Adoption

In adopting textbooks, states and localities should evaluate texts on the basis of their capacity to present rigorous and challenging material clearly and should require publishers to furnish evaluative data on effectiveness.

—No comparable provision—

—No comparable provision—

Excellence Commission

Twentieth Century Fund

ECS Economic Growth

Homework

Students in high schools should be assigned homework.

—No comparable provision—

States and local school districts should establish firm, explicit, and demanding requirements concerning homework.

Effective Study and Work Skills

Effective study and work skills should be introduced in the early grades and continued throughout the student's schooling.

—No comparable provision—

—No comparable provision—

PROGRAMS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

The federal government, in cooperation with states and localities, should help meet the needs of key groups of students such as the gifted and talented, socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, and the handicapped.

Federal efforts to provide special education programs for the poor and the handicapped should be continued.

Federal programs for the disadvantaged and limited English speaking should be maintained.

States and school districts should increase participation of young women and minorities in courses where they are underrepresented.

States and school districts should identify and challenge academically gifted students.

States and school systems should specifically include handicapped children in programs for education and economic growth.

Special Fellowships for Academies

—No comparable provision—

Special federal fellowships should be awarded to students to encourage the creation of small, individualized programs staffed by certified teachers and run as small-scale academies.

—No comparable provision—

COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS

Four-year colleges and universities should raise their admission standards in line with the recommended requirements for high school graduation.

—No comparable provision—

Colleges and universities should raise their entrance requirements.

Excellence Commission

Twentieth Century Fund

ECS Economic Growth

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS

Grades should be reliable indicators of a student's readiness for further study.

—No comparable provision—

States and school systems should establish requirements concerning discipline, grades, and other matters.

Standardized Tests	Standardized tests should be administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work. The purpose would be to certify credentials, identify the need for remedial work, and identify opportunities for enrichment.	—No comparable provision—	Effective programs should be established to monitor student progress through periodic testing of general achievement and specific skills. The testing program should be linked to a carefully designed program of remediation and enrichment for students who need special help.
Student Progress	Placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, should be guided by the academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age.	—No comparable provision—	Student progress should be measured by tests of general achievement and specific skills with promotion based on mastery, not age. States and local districts should establish firm, explicit, and demanding requirements concerning student grades.
Student Absences and Failures	Attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions should be used to reduce the amount of time lost through student absenteeism and tardiness.	—No comparable provision—	States, school systems, principals, teachers, and parents should work to reduce student absences and school failures. Efforts to deal with absenteeism and dropouts should include revitalizing course materials and making educational schedules flexible enough to accommodate students with special problems.

	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
Discipline	The burden on teachers to maintain discipline should be reduced by developing and enforcing firm and fair conduct codes and by considering alternative rooms, programs, and schools for disruptive students.	—No comparable provision—	States and local school districts should establish firm, explicit, and demanding requirements concerning student discipline.
TEACHERS	Teacher preparation should be improved, and teaching should be made a more rewarding profession.	A major federal initiative should be undertaken that emphasizes the critical importance of quality teachers in America's schools.	States and school districts should improve methods for recruiting, training and paying teachers.
Teacher Preparation	Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards, and to demonstrate competence in academic disciplines. Master teachers should be involved in designing teacher preparation programs. Resources should be used to solve the problem of a shortage of mathematics and science teachers.	—No comparable provision—	Every state and local school district, with the fullest participation of teachers, should drastically improve methods of training teachers. States, singly or in cooperation with one another, should establish better pre-service and in-service education programs for teachers.

Teacher Certification	Efforts should be made to have qualified persons with academic training in mathematics and science eligible to teach. Other areas of critical need, such as English, must also be addressed.	—No comparable provision—	Teacher certification processes should be changed to make it possible for qualified "outsiders" to serve in the schools.
	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
Master Teachers	School boards, administrators and teachers should cooperate to develop career ladders for teachers that distinguish among the beginning instructor, the experienced teacher, and the master teacher.	A national Master Teachers Program should be established, funded by the federal government, that recognizes and rewards teaching excellence.	States should create career ladders for teachers.
Teacher Education Institutions	Colleges and universities should be judged on the performance of their graduates.	—No comparable provision—	Each state should substantially restructure and renew its teacher training curriculum, and should upgrade the academic quality of the teacher training curriculum so that entering teachers will meet higher standards.
Teacher Salaries or Grants	Teacher salaries should be increased and made professionally competitive and market sensitive. School boards should adopt an 11-month contract for teachers. Teacher salaries should be performance based.	Master teachers would be awarded a grant of \$40,000 per year for a period of 5 years. An incentive approach should be adopted to provide awards to teachers of exceptional merit; awards should be numerous enough to attract national attention and substantial enough to keep the master teachers in the classroom.	Every state and local school district, with the fullest participation of teachers, should drastically improve methods for paying teachers. Financial incentives for teachers should be keyed to differing responsibilities and to filling critical needs in certain subject areas.
Teacher Performance	Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers may be rewarded, average ones may be encouraged, and poor ones may be either improved or terminated.	The master teacher proposal is designed to "pave the way for reconsideration of merit-based personnel systems."	Boards of education and higher education officials should cooperate with teachers and administrators on ways to measure the effectiveness of teachers and reward outstanding performance. Procedures should be tightened for deciding which teachers to retain and dismiss.
	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
Teacher Performance (cont.)	Master teachers should be involved in supervising teachers during their probationary years.		
Recognition of Teachers	—No comparable provision—	—No comparable provision—	States, communities, the media, and businesses should devise new ways to honor teachers.
Loans/Grants for Prospective Teachers	Incentives, such as grants and loans, should be made available to attract outstanding students into the teaching profession.	A scholarship program should be used to augment the supply of teachers in mathematics and science as well as in foreign languages.	Scholarships and other financial incentives should be used to attract the most able people into teaching.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	Citizens across the nation should hold educators and elected officials responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms.	The executive and legislative branches of the federal government should emphasize the need for better schools and a better education for all young Americans.	Schools should use effective management techniques.
Principals	Principals and superintendents must play a crucial role in developing school and community support for reforms. Administrative burdens and related intrusions on the teacher should be reduced to add to the time available for teaching and learning.	—No comparable provision—	Principals should be in charge of educational programs. Pay should be related to responsibilities and effectiveness. States should set higher standards for recruiting, training, and monitoring the performance of principals.
School Boards	School boards must consciously develop leadership skills at the school and district levels if the reforms are to be achieved.	—No comparable provision—	—No comparable provision—
	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
Educators, Parents, and Citizens	The Commission calls upon educators, parents, and citizens at all levels to assist in bringing about the reforms proposed in this report.	—No comparable provision—	—No comparable provision—
FISCAL SUPPORT	Citizens should provide the fiscal support and stability required to bring about the reforms.	The federal government must continue to help meet the special needs of poor and minority students while taking the lead in meeting the general and overwhelming need for educational quality.	Schools should make the best possible use of resources. More funds are needed from all sources for selective investments in efforts that promote quality.
Federal Government	(See "PROGRAMS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS.")	<p>Categorial programs required by the federal government should be funded through the federal treasury.</p> <p>The federal government should fund the Master Teachers Program.</p> <p>The federal government has a responsibility to help overcome the unevenness of state efforts to fund education.</p> <p>School districts with substantial numbers of immigrant children should receive federal impact aid.</p> <p>Federal funds now used for bilingual education should be used to teach non-English-speaking children how to speak, read, and write English.</p>	The federal government has an essential supporting role in financing education.

	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
States and Localities	State and local school officials, including school board members, governors, and legislators have the primary responsibility for financing and governing schools, and incorporating these reforms into educational policies and fiscal planning.	—No comparable provision—	States and localities have the chief responsibility for supporting the schools and making educational policy. States should continue efforts to secure more equitable distribution of educational resources. More human, financial, and institutional resources should be invested in education.
FEDERAL ROLE	<p>The federal government's role includes several functions of national consequence that states and localities are unlikely to be able to meet: protecting the constitutional and civil rights of students and personnel; collecting data, statistics, and general information about education; supporting teacher training in these areas of shortage or key national needs; and providing student financial assistance and research and graduate training. Assistance should be provided with a minimum of administrative burden and intrusiveness.</p> <p>The federal government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education and also to help fund and support efforts to protect and promote that interest.</p>	<p>The executive and legislative branches of the federal government are called upon to emphasize the need for better schools and a better education for young Americans.</p> <p>The federal government should promote and support proficiency in English for all children in the public schools, but especially for those who do not speak English, or have only a limited command of English.</p> <p>Federal attention and assistance should go to economically depressed localities with concentrations of immigrant and/or impoverished groups as well as those that already are making strong efforts to improve their educational performance. The federal government should emphasize programs to develop basic scientific literacy among</p>	(See "Federal Government" under "FISCAL SUPPORT" above.)

	Excellence Commission	Twentieth Century Fund	ECS Economic Growth
FEDERAL ROLE (cont.)		all citizens and programs to provide advanced training in mathematics and science for secondary school students.	
		(Also, see "TEACHERS" above.)	
Federal Research Efforts	(See "FEDERAL ROLE" above.)	Federal support should be provided for specific research activities such as basic data, educational performance, evaluation of federal education programs, and fundamental research into learning processes.	—No comparable provision—

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

(See "LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT.")

—No comparable provision—

Each state should develop and implement a plan for improving education in grades K-12. Each governor should appoint a broadly inclusive task force on education for economic growth. This task force should develop an implementation plan for the state.

Each local school district also should develop its own implementation plan.

BUSINESS/ EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

—No comparable provision—

—No comparable provision—

Partnerships for improving education should be formed with participation by businesses, labor, and the professions. Public officials, higher education officials, and school officials should establish their own partnerships.