



An Open Letter from America's Great City School Superintendents, Chancellors and Chief Executive Officers in Support of the Common Core State Standards

June 2, 2010

Efforts to raise student achievement in the nation's urban schools are paying off. Math and reading scores are going up—in most cases outpacing the national average for improvement—while superintendents are staying on the job longer and more schools are debunking the myth that urban students can't perform at high levels.

Leaders of urban school systems have made innovation and excellence a priority. They have experimented with nontraditional leadership, smaller schools, instructional reforms, and aggressive interventions in low-performing schools. They have moved to attract and retain qualified teachers with new compensation systems that reward performance, and by providing better training and support for teachers. And they are becoming smarter and more targeted in their use of limited resources. The efforts are producing results.

However, even the best efforts will not get all students to the levels of performance needed to compete in today's global economy until we repair the patchwork system of U.S. standards that encourages high expectations in one community while discouraging those expectations in another.

Public education is supposed to promote a level playing field for our young people. Instead, the standards now in place do the opposite by institutionalizing uneven expectations and outcomes. In the absence of a clear and consistent set of common academic standards for what should be expected of all children, each state instead sets its own standards for what kids should know and be able to do. Sometimes these standards are high; often they are not. Either way, the inconsistencies between them serve to perpetuate the nation's educational inequities at a time when we should be working to overcome them. This issue is particularly important in America's largest cities, which educate millions of the students the nation most desperately wants to help.

With proper support for implementation, the Common Core State Standards will help us solve these problems. These standards will help us ensure that high school graduates across the country are adequately prepared to compete in the global economy, no matter which state they come from. These standards will give all our schools common targets, clarifying what we expect teachers to be teaching and what we will hold schools and districts accountable for. These standards will give us, for once, a common definition of what academic proficiency means and what it doesn't mean, rather than having 50 different definitions. Not only will this help schools focus their efforts on one set of high standards, it will undercut the temptation by individual states to lower their standards or dumb down their tests to meet federal targets.

The Common Core State Standards will allow us to determine more effectively who is making the most progress and how they are doing it, something that is nearly impossible to do under the fractured system now in place. These standards would give curriculum and test developers, publishers, and education schools a way to align their work. (In an attempt to include every state's standards, textbooks now cover more material than can be mastered in a school year, resulting in more remedial work in subsequent grades.)

There is little reason to think, as some critics have claimed, that common standards would undermine the nation's tradition of local control of schools. Not many of those critics are superintendents in the nation's largest cities, where we have more than enough local decisions to make. The freedom to teach to inconsistent standards that don't prepare our students for college and careers is not a freedom we would fight for. We the undersigned are urban school leaders from across the country who support the new Common Core State Standards and will be working hard in the coming years to implement them.

We believe it is only through common standards that we can deliver on the promise of equity implicit in the purpose of public education, and give all our young people a real shot at the American dream. We are pleased that the Council of the Great City Schools, the first national education membership organization to come out in favor of having common standards, has helped spearhead the effort and has represented us in the standards development process. We urge the states to work with us on the adoption and implementation of the new standards, and we recommend that the nation support them. Thank you.

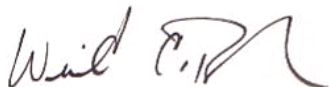
Sincerely,



Michael Casserly, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools



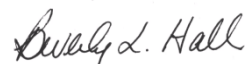
Carol Johnson, Chair of the Board
Council of the Great City Schools
Boston Public Schools Superintendent



Winston Brooks, Superintendent
Albuquerque Public Schools



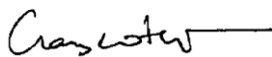
Carol Comeau, Superintendent
Anchorage School District



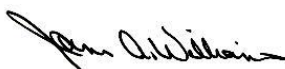
Beverly Hall, Superintendent
Atlanta Public Schools



Andres Alonso, Chief Executive Officer
Baltimore City Public Schools



Craig Witherspoon, Superintendent
Birmingham City Schools



James Williams, Superintendent
Buffalo City School District



Nancy McGinley, Superintendent
Charleston County Public Schools



Peter Gorman, Superintendent
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



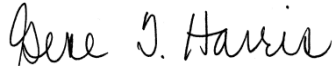
Ron Huberman, Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Public Schools



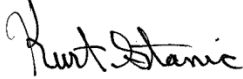
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Cincinnati Public Schools



Walt Rulffes, Superintendent
Clark County School District



Gene Harris, Superintendent
Columbus Public Schools



Kurt Stanic, Superintendent
Dayton Public Schools



Michelle Rhee, Chancellor
District of Columbia Public Schools



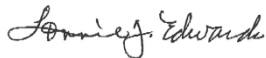
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East Baton Rouge Parish School System



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Fresno Unified School District



Terry Grier, Superintendent
Houston Independent School District



Lonnie Edwards, Sr., Superintendent
Jackson Public School District



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Duval County Public Schools



Melody Johnson, Superintendent
Fort Worth Independent School District



MaryEllen Elia, Superintendent
Hillsborough County School District



Eugene White, Superintendent
Indianapolis Public Schools



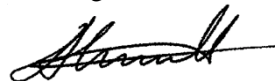
Sheldon Berman, Superintendent
Jefferson County Public Schools



Linda Watson, Superintendent
Little Rock School District



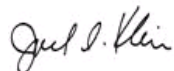
Ramon Cortines, Superintendent
Los Angeles Unified School District



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William Green, Superintendent
Minneapolis Public Schools



Joel Klein, Chancellor
New York City Department of Education



Stephen Jones, Superintendent
Norfolk Public Schools



Karl Springer, Superintendent
Oklahoma City Public Schools



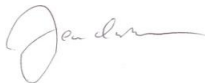
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Orange County Public Schools



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Pittsburgh Public Schools



Thomas Brady, Superintendent
Providence Public Schools



Jean-Claude Brizard, Superintendent
Rochester City School District



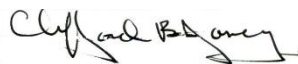
William Kowba, Interim Superintendent
San Diego Unified School District



Maria Goodloe-Johnson, Superintendent
Seattle Public Schools



Valeria Silva, Superintendent
St. Paul Public Schools



Clifford Janey, Superintendent
Newark Public Schools



Anthony Smith, Superintendent
Oakland Unified School District



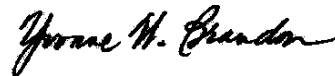
John Mackiel, Superintendent of Schools
Omaha Public Schools



Arlene Ackerman, Superintendent
Philadelphia Public Schools



Carole Smith, Superintendent
Portland Public Schools



Yvonne Brandon, Superintendent
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McKell Withers, Superintendent
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Toledo Public Schools