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A MESSAGE TO AMERICA

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Why the United States' 50-Year Failure to Modernize Our Education System Threatens Our Economy, Social Stability and Democracy

How Maryland's New Education Plan Could Be a Template for Once Again Producing the Best-Educated Workforce in the World and Broadly Shared Prosperity for the U.S.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For well over a century, the United States led the world in providing education to its citizens. Its reward was global economic leadership and a very high, broadly distributed standard of living. Fifty years ago, that leadership came to an end, as other nations, many of them with populations largely illiterate at that time, began to provide the typical level of U.S. education to many or most of their citizens. The top-performing nations on international education assessments went much further, vaulting way ahead of U.S. performance, while the performance of the American high school student has stood still since the 1970s. The result is that millennial workers in the U.S. are now tied for the lowest level of basic skills in the industrialized world, having 50 years ago been the best-educated workers in the world.

This simple fact must be recognized for what it is: an existential crisis for the U.S. Strong backs are no longer the key to economic success for individuals or countries. Strong minds are, more than ever, the key to broadly shared prosperity. The differences in earnings between the well-educated and the poorly educated in the United States have been mounting decade by decade. The U.S. is about to pay a terrible price for the neglect of its education system. The enormous and widening differences in income produced by the interaction between our failure to modernize our education system on the one hand, and the dynamics of the global economy and the effects of advancing digital technologies on the other hand, could lead to the collapse of our democracy. There is not much time to lose.

Strong backs are no longer the key to economic success for individuals or countries. Strong minds are, more than ever, the key to broadly shared prosperity.

Our best hope is simple: that we will, at last, realize the key to creating a world-class education system is simply to learn from those who have already done it, the countries with the best education systems. Under our Constitution, this is a job not for the U.S. as a whole but rather for each state, acting on its own behalf.

The "Message to America" that we lay out here also serves as a policy brief as we describe the recent work of the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, popularly known as the Kirwan Commission, which issued its Interim Report last fall.

The Kirwan Commission was charged three years ago by the Governor and Maryland state legislature with updating the

state's school finance formulas and making recommendations that would enable Maryland students to perform at levels comparable to the levels of students in the top-performing countries. It was to accomplish this by studying the education systems of those countries and using what it learned to fulfill its mission. This policy brief describes the composition of the Commission, how it operated and what it proposed.

The path the Kirwan Commission followed—and the Maryland legislature has strongly supported—is a path any state can follow to get to the top of the global education tables. The Maryland path that is now underway can be the starting point for any state that wants to achieve what Maryland has achieved.

FROM THE WORLD'S BEST EDUCATED WORKFORCE TO THE LEAST WELL EDUCATED IN THE INDUSTRIAL WORLD: AN EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

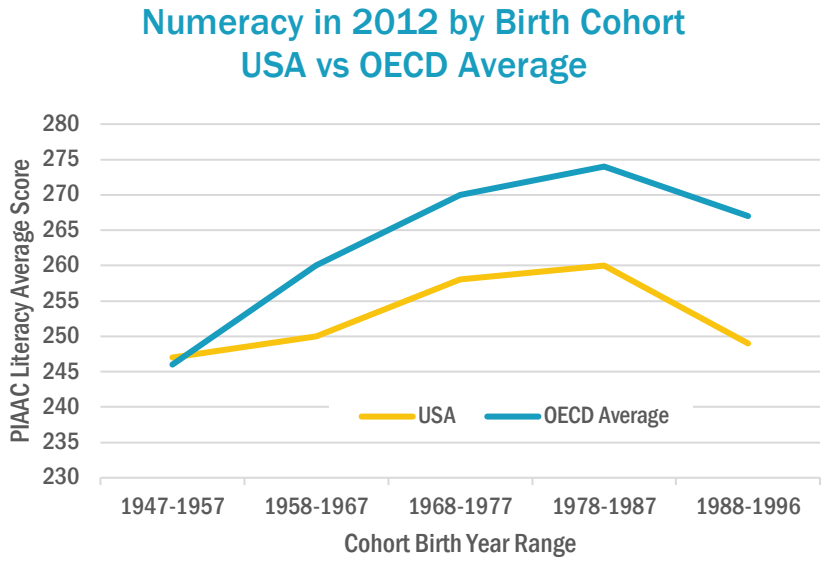
When it comes to education, the United States has been asleep at the switch for 50 years. Half a century ago, economists everywhere agreed that the United States had the most successful education system in the world. From the middle of the 19th century on, we led the world, first in offering free elementary schools to our children, then, toward the end of that century and the beginning of the next, in offering a free education to our secondary school students and finally, after World War II, when we built the first mass higher education system in the world. Many economists believe that the strength of our education system was a very strong factor in our remarkable economic performance and domination of the whole world, in the decades following that war right into the 1970s. And then the steady decade-after-decade improvement in our education system suddenly leveled off.

Few Americans realize that the measured achievement of American high school students in the basic skills has not changed at all since the 1970s as one nation after another has first equaled us in performance and then zoomed right past us. The average student in the top-performing countries leaves high school two-and-a-half years ahead of our average high school graduate. Most of the high school graduates who go off to college in the United States attend an institution with a curriculum that would be considered a

high school curriculum in the top-performing countries. What we call career and technical education in the U.S. simply does not count as a serious vocational education in the top-performing countries. By almost any measure, the U.S. is far, far behind a growing number of top performers. Their numbers now include countries such as Poland, Estonia and Slovenia as well as Singapore and the Chinese province of Shanghai, which would hardly have registered at all on any measure of student performance back in the 1960s, when we were riding high.

Back in the 1970s, when globalization was just getting under way, most of the countries in the world were largely illiterate. In many of the more developed countries, higher education—and even secondary education in some countries—was only for the elites.

Fast forward to today. Many of the countries whose populations had been largely illiterate in the 1970s are now educating many or even most of their citizens to the same standards that at least half our students are educated to, but they charge much less for their labor in a labor market that is now worldwide. Employers in high-wage countries like ours can get workers in low-wage countries who cost them much less. That is one of the most important reasons why the wages of the average worker have been flat relative to inflation in the United States while corporate profits have been rising. An education that used to guarantee the typical American high school graduate a good job at the local GM automobile assembly plant will fetch far less now. A vast and rising surplus of young people coming out of high school here cannot justify their wages on the basis of what they know and can do.



That proportion is swiftly growing. Why? Because for every job that is being outsourced to another country that can offer equally well-educated workers at much lower wages, many more jobs are being eliminated by automation. Experts suggest that roughly half of the jobs in the United States can be done by robots today. The main reason they are not being done by robots is that it costs more for the robots to do them than for humans to do them. But the robots are becoming more capable, more reliable and cheaper with every passing week, and soon it will make more sense to replace the humans with machines.

The dynamics of the global economy are combining with the effects of the increasing use of intelligent machines to eviscerate the market for people who leave high school with only what we call the "basic skills." Those skills aren't basic anymore. Not when machines that have those skills and more are replacing gas station attendants, grocery store clerks, restaurant wait staff, cooks, truck drivers, miners, inventory takers, legal assistants, travel agents, insurance company back office staff, warehouse stock pickers, farm tractor drivers and, shortly, bus drivers, truck drivers, car drivers, limo drivers and many others. Although it is true that some of the jobs being lost to machines are being replaced by new jobs that these technologies are creating, in the vast majority of cases, the new jobs require much higher skills than the jobs being lost.

When the system is no longer producing a life of dignity for most people in a society, democracy, freedom and capitalism are in danger.

We are running out of time.

Democracies are social compacts. As long as the system—the democratic way of doing things—is working for most voters, it is at least possible to sustain democracy and freedom. However, when the system is no longer producing a life of dignity for most people in a society, democracy, freedom and capitalism are in danger. It is not hard at all to see how the failure of our education system to enable a growing proportion of our fellow citizens to earn a decent living and gain the dignity that comes from being able to contribute to family and community is creating a world in which our democracy is in mortal danger.

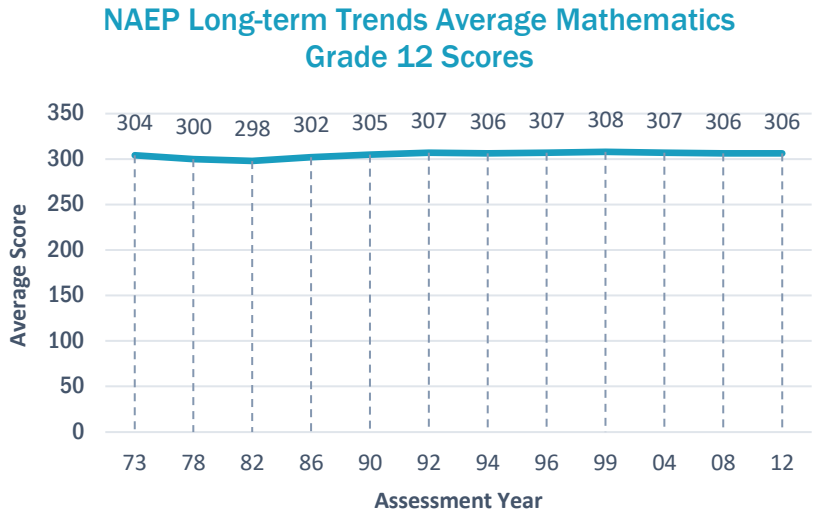
We are running out of time. It is very hard and takes a long time to change education systems, and once the system is transformed, it takes a generation or more to see the fruits of those changes in better educated and more highly-skilled workers in the workplace. If a society gets to the point where it has exhausted the resources it has available for investment because it has borrowed so much to survive, then it will no longer be possible to change our education system in the way it must be changed. And that will inevitably end in a

decline in living standards so steep that democracy cannot possibly survive.

THE OBVIOUS ANSWER: BENCHMARKING THE BEST

Since the 1970s, the United States has tried everything: more money (we now spend more than twice as much per student after accounting for inflation then we did then), lower class size, choice and charters, instructional technology, test-based teacher accountability and many other "silver bullet" solutions to our student achievement challenge. None have worked. High school student performance, whether measured by PISA or NAEP, has been flat.

The obvious answer is staring us in the face. If someone else is outperforming you, the way to get better is to figure out how they do it. Football teams study their competitors relentlessly. Generals study battles won by their own side and the opposition. American manufacturing firms, put out of business by Japanese firms using advanced manufacturing methods in the '70s and '80s, studied how they did it, often matched their performance, and sometimes ended up beating them at their own game.



THE MARYLAND COMMISSION ON INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Most of the top-performing countries are the size not of the United States, but of individual states. No one wants a national school board, and our U.S. Department of Education is not authorized to act like one. Convincing the entire nation to decide to rebuild its education system along the lines charted by the top performers is a fool's errand. Yet, it has not been so hard to envision one state doing so, nor has it been hard to envision other states following in their footsteps.

Six years ago, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) asked the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) to assist a newly formed NCSL study group that had been asked to study the education systems of the countries with the best education systems in the world and report back to their members. NCEE helped the study group conduct that research and write its report, *No Time to Lose,* which quickly became the most asked-for report on education ever issued by NCSL. Among the members of the study group was Rachel Hise, the highly-regarded education lead staff member in the Maryland Department of Legislative Services.

Three years ago, the Maryland legislature created a new Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education. The legislature charged the Commission with revising the state's school finance formula, something many legislatures have done over time, but influenced by the NCSL study group's work, they also did something no legislature in the U.S. had ever done before. They tasked the Commission with studying the education systems of the top-performing education systems in the world and, having done that, proposing policies and practices the Governor, legislature, State Department of Education and other stakeholders should adopt to enable Maryland to create a state school system that would equal the top performers in achievement, equity and efficiency. The state appointed William "Brit" Kirwan, the revered former Chancellor of the University System of Maryland to chair the Commission and Rachel Hise as the lead staffer. The two together asked NCEE to provide expert assistance to the Commission, alongside the Department of Legislative Services staff and with assistance on financial matters from APA Consulting of Denver, Colorado.

The 25-member Commission includes the top representatives of all of the major stakeholders (including, among others, the teachers union, school boards, superintendents, county executives and advocacy groups); top members of the legislature on education policy (including chairs and members of both authorizing and appropriations committees), the heads of relevant state agencies (including members of the State Board of Education, the Chief State School Officer, the Chancellor of the University System), the State Budget Secretary (representing the Governor), a top representative of the business community and other key players.

The Commission's members met monthly for over two years, for a day at a time and sometimes longer. NCEE was asked to conduct a gap analysis, comparing Maryland policies and practices in detail with those of the top-performing countries and the top-performing states, using a detailed framework—*9 Building Blocks for a World-Class Education Systems*—developed by NCEE to identify the primary factors accounting for the top performers' success.

The Commission immersed themselves in the gap analysis data, and in the analysis of that data using the 9 Building Blocks framework. They considered NCEE's recommendations and heard a wide range of testimony from many groups and individuals in the state, as well as extended conversations with other state, national and international experts. Chairman Kirwan was constantly testing the Commission's impressions and ideas with people from all over the state.

After months of discussion and debate the Commission came to preliminary agreement on policies designed to vault Maryland into the front ranks of global performers. This agreement was on a design for a rebuilt Maryland education system, adapted to that state's unique goals, culture, politics, history and values, but built on the frameworks, analysis and recommendations they heard and learned about in the previous two years.

The Maryland legislative services staff, NCEE and APA Consulting were then asked to cost out the preliminary proposed reform agenda. The Commission then broke into Working Groups to work with the staff on the cost estimates and to refine the policy proposals. Finally, the Commission then reconvened as a committee of the whole to agree on the policy proposals and the estimated costs.

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THE MARYLAND COMMISSION IN RECENT NATIONAL CONTEXT

Before describing what the Commission learned from its study of the top-performing systems, it is useful to step back to consider where the Kirwan Commission report fits into the broad arc of education reform in the United States.

We have already reported the negative finding that none of the much-touted education reforms of the last few decades have moved the needle on student performance. But this is not the first time in the modern era that a state has redesigned its whole education system.

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The first time was in 1990, with the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). Responding to a finding by the state Supreme Court in a school finance case that invalidated Kentucky's entire education law, the legislature passed KERA, which resulted in vaulting the state from one of the worst-performing in the nation to the middle of the pack, where it has remained ever since.

Three years later, in 1993, Massachusetts passed the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. Although there was a school finance case in the background here too, the driver was a high-tech entrepreneur who mobilized the state's high-tech council to become the engine that created a broad bipartisan coalition. This coalition included the Governor, the state legislature, the state board of education, the business community writ large and the teachers' union around a design that closely matched NCEE's analysis of the factors associated with high-performing education systems. That education reform act enabled Massachusetts to enter the league of global top performers and to greatly outdistance all other American states in average student performance.

Massachusetts faced a persistent problem, however. While the performance of low-income and minority students improved after the reform act was enacted, the gap between these students and other student populations was not noticeably reduced.[1]

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[1] http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/mcas.aspx

What Maryland set out to do was to take the obvious, but very difficult, next step: both raise average achievement to world-class levels *and*, at the same time, substantially close the gap. No state has ever done that before, and it is not clear that any state has seriously set that as an objective—*the* objective—of state policy in education. It is precisely on this point that Maryland can lay claim to taking on the central challenge of American education and where Maryland may turn out to be the flagship state for the United States.

SO, WHAT DID THE COMMISSION LEARN FROM THE GAP ANALYSIS AND HOW DID IT RESPOND TO WHAT IT LEARNED?

The gap analysis began with data on the performance of the Maryland system vis-a-vis the top performers in the United States and abroad.

Maryland set out to both raise average achievement to world-class levels *and*, at the same time, substantially close the gap. No state has ever done that before.

This comparative analysis was a very sobering experience for the Commission members. Many came to the first meeting with the understanding that the United States performed well—or at least well enough—in comparison to other countries and, with the conviction that Maryland was a top performer within the U.S., based mainly on a ranking of the states done every year by *Education Week*.[2] But they were very dismayed to find out not only how far behind the world's top performers they were, but to discover that Maryland was only an average performer on the National Assessment of Educational Progress ("the Nation's Report Card"), even though the average for personal income in the state is far above the averages of other states. Maryland turned out to be a mediocre performer in a country that is a mediocre performer. This sobering beginning lay the foundation in understanding for the Commission members to then study the top performers to see what they could learn from them.

Well-designed, coherent systems—not just individual policies—are crucially important

Overall, when comparing Maryland and the U.S. to the top-performing countries, there is one single biggest factor

[2] https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2018-state-grades/report-card-map-rankings.html

that seemed to distinguish the top performers from our states: Here, education reform is the history of "silver bullet" solutions, all stacked on top of each other, with none ever going away or designed to work together. In the U.S. we have an environment in which all teachers see is a long series of "flavors of the week," offered by an ever-changing array of principals, superintendents, chief state school officers, state legislators and federal officials.

Yet, amid all this change on the surface, the basic design of the typical state and local school system—a system designed to meet the needs of a mass production manufacturing economy—is essentially unchanged over the last 100 years. And it does not work anymore. The Commission realized that the poor performance of the system is not due to some rotten class of actors who are falling down on the job or simply refusing to do it; it is due to the poor design of the system itself. Everyone is a victim of a system that brings out the worst in us, not the best in us. It is the system, not the actors in it, that needs reform.

The Commission set out to create a design where all the parts and pieces would fit together.

The top performers around the world typically have one ministry that is focused on creating one coherent system that serves everyone, the parts and pieces of which are designed to work in harmony; as a result, it is possible to produce consistent high performance with very little variation in performance among schools and among different groups of students in the system. In the United States, responsibility for policy is distributed in a way that is nearly random among and within different levels of government. Top-performing systems are typically highly stable over long periods of time, though they are constantly adjusted to meet the needs of a changing economy and society. In the U.S, for all practical purposes, we have 14,000 different school systems that differ wildly in performance across districts and even within them. In summary, although the specific features of the top-performing systems differ, the principles underlying all of them are remarkably similar, and those very similar systems turn out to be very different from the principles that underlie our 14,000 systems.

Recognizing this, the Commission set out to create a design where all the parts and pieces would fit together. That would include the work of a whole skein of state agencies, the higher education system working hand in glove with the schools, the schools working hand in glove with the social services agencies, and the employers working hand in glove with the career and technical education educators in both the schools and the community colleges

The top performers set minimum expectations for ALL students at global benchmarks, while the United States, in practice, sets very different expectations for different groups of students, in a big sorting machine.

The Commission wanted to end the sorting machine and set up a new system that would in fact and not just in rhetoric get all students to standards as high as those reached by students in the top-performing countries, so it proposed setting a new College and Career Ready (CCR) academic standard at the level required to ensure that every student is ready to succeed in the first year of a typical Maryland community college program.

The Commission made it clear that Maryland schools will be held responsible for getting most students to that standard by the end of grade 10, most of the rest by the end of grade 12.

Students who reach that standard will be qualified to use their junior and senior year to pursue a program designed to get them admitted to selective colleges, but they could also enter a program that could result in transfer directly into the sophomore year of a four-year college when they graduate high school; or they could enter a world-class career and technical education program resulting in a rewarding job and the beginning of a strong career right after graduating high school.

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The Commission determined that Maryland, like most states, views career and technical education as the option for students who cannot do academics, an attitude which all too often makes career and technical education the option for students who have no other options and results in the award of credentials that have very little value in the marketplace. They discovered that the top performers view career and technical education as an option for students who can do academics but who prefer a more applied form of education and who may want to go right to work after high school. That conception of career and technical education would require rebuilding the Maryland system.

The Commission proposed that 1) a new body be created in the Governor's Workforce Development Board to oversee the development and implementation of a world-class career and technical education system for the state that would eventually enroll on the order of 45 percent of the state's high school students; 2) the standards for workforce training and the criteria for employer involvement would be set by

representatives of industry and labor, offerings would be tailored to state and employer projections of the need for skilled technicians, and employers and unions would play a key role in assessing student performance against the standards; 3) a substantial part of the student experience would be in workplaces, provided by the employer, or in certain cases, by the unions, and this experience would have many of the attributes of European apprenticeship programs wherever possible; and 4) the design of the career and technical education program for high schools would be fully integrated with the design for career and technical education in the community colleges and universities, creating a smooth progression in courses, programs and credentials from high school through community college to advanced university-level career and technical education programs

To make sure that all students actually reach the standards that they set for them, the top performers start at birth or even before to put in place a skein of supports for families with young children and additional supports for families of school-age children who need additional support both inside and outside of school to reach high standards. These resources are typically provided on a much larger scale than in the U.S. It is likely that the cost of these resources at least equals the amount by which per pupil spending in the U.S. exceeds the per pupil cost of schooling in the top-performing countries.

The Commission proposed a wide range of measures to provide the supports students will need to substantially close the gap between the top-performing students in Maryland and those who perform the least well, among them:

1. Having the state develop a curriculum framework set to the new standards and structured so that the progression from the beginning of first grade to the award of the CCR certificate at the end of grade 10 is clear; having the state construct a curriculum with course syllabi matched to this framework and potentially requiring schools in which students are not making adequate progress toward the CCR to teach to these syllabi;
2. Having students who are falling behind the framework targets at any point from first grade on get extra assistance during the school day, before school, after school, on Saturdays, during the summer, so they can keep up;

3. Providing extra tutoring for students who need it;
4. Providing wrap-around services to many more families with pre-school children, with priority given to low-income families throughout the state;
5. Providing increased wrap-around services for schools where high proportions of their students live in poverty, using a new weight in the school finance formula designated for students in concentrated poverty;
6. Providing more high-quality early childhood education to all families including free, full-day programs for all low-income 3- and 4-year-olds and with fees set on a sliding scale for other 4-year-olds;
7. Providing a higher ratio of teachers to students in schools serving low-income and English Language Learners; and
8. Increasing the amount of the weight in the school finance formula for special education students

All of the top performers work hard to make sure all students have very-high quality teachers; most make teaching so attractive that they are able to recruit from the upper distribution of their high school classes whereas the U.S. gets most of its teachers from the middle of its high school classes. To make sure that Maryland has the kind of world-class teacher workforce needed to bring its students to world-class levels of achievement, the Commission proposed that:

1. Financial incentives in the form of scholarships covering the cost of attending a Maryland public institution be provided to prospective teachers to attract a diverse array of high-performing high school seniors and college students into a career in teaching if they agree to serve at least two years in schools serving predominantly low-income students (see above);
2. Matching funds be provided to higher education institutions to enable them to participate in national programs designed to attract a diverse array of students to careers in teaching;
3. The criteria used by the state to approve university-based teacher education programs be made much more stringent;

4. The universities be required to devote more of a trainee's time to clinical training in a diverse array of schools selected and supported for that purpose, staffed jointly and jointly managed with the school districts; and
5. The demand-level of the criteria used to determine whether the state will certify school of education graduates as teachers in Maryland be greatly raised, including both the criteria for mastery of the content to be taught as well as the skills of the prospective teacher in teaching that content.

But changes in recruitment and training are not the only things that top-performing countries do to attract talented people to and retain them in careers in teaching. Like them, the Kirwan Commission also addressed compensation issues and modernized the career of teaching to make it more like that of the high-status professions. Specifically, it established:

1. Career ladders for teachers, like those that attorneys, engineers, accountants and architects have, so that, as teachers gain more and more expertise, they have more responsibility, more authority, more status and more compensation;
2. Regular review of prevailing compensation of high-status professionals with comparable education in order to set teachers' salaries at those levels;
3. Certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards as a requirement for the top level of the common career ladder; with two branches of the ladder above that level being created, one for leadership roles in teaching from lead, master to professor master teacher, the other into leadership roles in the principalship. The Commission further proposed that the criteria for moving up the teacher side of the ladder be based on teaching expertise, contribution to the work of teacher teams, ability to lead teacher teams and the ability to mentor other teachers; and
4. A new design of the work of teachers, along the lines of what is happening in the top-performing countries, so that they spend less time in front of students in class and more time working with other teachers in teams tasked with improving curriculum and instruction, tutoring students who need extra individual help,

researching best practice all over the world, and evaluating the effects of their own work so they can improve it and learn from each other by visiting and offering constructive feedback on each other's work.

Although a previous state Commission on school finance reform, the Thornton Commission, recommended substantial increases in school funding, the results were disappointing because the school districts, largely free to spend the new funds as they wished, changed their practices very little. Further, the Commission discovered that the top-performing countries devote as much attention to the careful and full coordination and implementation of their new policies as they do to their formation. To make sure that increased funds for education it proposes are spent in the way the Commission intends, the Commission proposed a unique system of accountability in which:

1. An Oversight Board will be established in Maryland government and charged with developing a ten-year detailed implementation plan in consultation with many organizations and institutions in and out of government and then with making sure that the funds provided for implementation of the plan by the legislature are used in the ways the legislature intended them to be used, consistent with the Commission's design; and
2. The Board will:
    - Review and approve all regulations issued by the agencies intended to implement the provisions of the enabling legislation
    - Review and approve decisions to release funds to the designated recipients
    - Provide comment to the Governor and the legislature on budget requests related to implementation of the plan prior to action by the Governor and the legislature
    - Have the authority to withhold funds from school districts if they fail to make a good faith effort to use those funds to implement the provisions of the enabling legislation.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK AND PROPOSALS

Legislation providing just under $1 billion for the first tranche of funding for the Commission's proposals overwhelmingly passed the Maryland legislature on April 5, 2019. That legislation is titled *The Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. The work of the Commission, however, is not yet over. At the request of the legislature, the Commission has set up a working group to make recommendations to the Commission as to how the cost of implementing the Commission's recommendations should be divided between the state and the school districts (counties). The Commission's final report is expected in December 2019. Many of the recommendations made in the Interim Report were incorporated in the initial legislation, but only in brief. Additional legislation must be filed, debated and voted on to establish these recommendations in law in the detail required to implement the full intent of the Commission. In the coming legislative session, this effort will continue.

The United States has for years embraced an education "reform" agenda based on test-based accountability, choice and charters. But that agenda has run out of steam.

IMPLEMENTING THE COMMISSION REPORT

The report is the antithesis of a silver bullet solution. Its purpose is to build a 21st century education system to meet 21st century needs. It cannot be implemented all at once because some parts must be fully implemented before implementation of other parts can begin. The Commission knew that it would take years to implement it. That means that it can only be implemented if the Executive and legislative branches and many stakeholders are committed to it. That is exactly what happened in Massachusetts. The broad and deep support it received from the stakeholders and officeholders on the Commission auger well. A smaller group might have acted more quickly, but a price would have been paid for that speed when parties changed and individuals moved on.

The fact that this Commission, composed as it is, produced this report means that other states could produce a manifesto of this sort with the right leadership and the right support. The United States has for years embraced an education "reform" agenda based on test-based accountability, choice and charters. But that agenda has run out of steam, the victim of its inability to move the needle on student achievement, equity or efficiency.

The Maryland Commission's agenda *is* the new national education reform agenda. It is not the result of guesswork or ideology. It is the agenda actually pursued by the nations that have been outperforming the United States for years. We do not have to invent it. We just have to do it. To those who say that it is the right agenda but it could never happen in the United States, we say, "Kentucky took the first step in 1990 and leaped way ahead in student performance. Massachusetts did it four years later with a plan that looked more like those of the global top performers and joined their ranks. Now a brilliantly led, very representative state commission in Maryland has done it, laying a plan both for raising average student performance to global benchmarks and for substantially closing the gaps as well. If this group of stakeholders and legislators could get behind this kind of whole system reform in Maryland, they could do it anywhere."

ON THE FEDERAL ROLE IN EDUCATION

The Maryland Commission's agenda is the new national education reform agenda. It is not the result of guesswork or ideology.

As we noted in the introduction to this brief, NCEE regards the Maryland plan as a plan for state action, not federal government action. Our states have the constitutional right and responsibility to run their own systems. The clock is ticking, and it's clear that if states want to match the performance of top-performing countries, there is nothing to stop them.

But NCEE believes that the federal government has a role to play in making the U.S. education system once again one of the best in the world:

- States that come up with plans like Maryland's should be granted waivers from federal laws and regulations that interfere with their implementation, except for civil rights laws;
- The federal government should create a fund providing substantial financial support for states to plan and then implement plans of the kind that Maryland has produced;
- It should provide funds to universities and research and policy analysis organizations to conduct research that can assist states wishing to follow in Maryland's steps and also to evaluate their efforts, providing feedback that can be useful to those states in the continuous improvement of their plans and implementation designs; and

- Further, the federal government should support a broadly conceived continuing program of international benchmarking research on the world's top-performing systems, so that the U.S. can be sure that its states are familiar with global best practices as they evolve.

Thus far, education has not been in the forefront of the issues being discussed by the candidates for President in the next general election. It must be. If the nation fails to modernize our century-old design for public education, if we fail to meet the challenge in this arena laid down by those who are now far ahead, little else that we do will matter, because we will not have the highly-educated citizenry we need to chart our course and lead fulfilling lives. We will instead have sown the seeds of resentment, discord and struggle for growing numbers of our children and our fellow citizens and we will no longer have the resources to recover. The Maryland plan is important because it offers a realistic path to the future we should want for ourselves and for all of our children.

"There is no topic more important to the quality of life of Marylanders than that addressed by the Commission. Maryland's preK-12 education system today is average among the states and failing among the nations with which we most often compete for jobs. The Commission's recommendations, if implemented, provide a means to reverse the current pattern of decline." - **Norman Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin Corp**

"Maryland's Commission represented all the major education stakeholders in the state. It was one of the first to be charged with making recommendations about what it will take for the state to reach the levels of educational achievement and equity accomplished by the leading countries in the world...With help from the National Center on Education and the Economy, the Commission relied on some of the best research, evidence and expertise that the U.S. and other countries have to offer. The resulting plan is powerful, coherent, and if pursued and appropriately refined over time, could vault Maryland to a position of global leadership in education...This moment is a propitious one for strong gains in Maryland and for offering guidance to other states that are looking to create a coherent approach to creating an excellent and equitable education system." - **Linda Darling Hammond, president and CEO, Learning Policy Institute and president, California State Board of Education**

"There are very few states that have been able to put together a cogent plan that brings together the major levers that could result in substantial improvement in student achievement, respect for educators, opportunities for young children, and career needs for high school graduates. Throw in coordinated provisions for governance, attention to at-risk kids, and school leadership opportunities and you have a real chance at true reform in education. That is what the Maryland Commission is presenting and I hope State leadership will move boldly to implement their recommendations." – **David Driscoll, former Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

"The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education has issued a call to action for the adoption of policy frameworks that would significantly elevate teaching and learning in Maryland. Our students deserve a world-class education. I urge every Maryland leader to answer this call." - **Nancy Grasmick, former Maryland State Superintendent of Schools**

"Over more than 40 years, I have worked with governors, legislators, educators, and corporate leaders in 22 states to develop specific policies and funding to promote systemic education change. Without a doubt, the Kirwan Commission's recommendations are the best. "
- **David Hornbeck, former State Superintendent and former Superintendent of Philadelphia Schools.**

"With the support of NCEE, the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education has produced a landmark report that, if fully and faithfully implemented, would transform the state's PreK-12 system over the next ten years from one in which today fewer than 40 percent of its high school graduates are deemed "college and career ready" into one of the best-performing school systems in the world. The question that remains is whether the state will have the aspiration, will and persistence to follow the bold path laid out by the Commission." - **William E. "Brit" Kirwan, chair of the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education**

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