

Roundtable News, March 1, 2016

Greetings!, The Roundtable continues to grow and we have 2016 meetings scheduled in San Francisco and Washington, DC. In other news:

- Can Your State Education Agency handle ESSA Challenges?
- Failing Grade for State Takeovers
- Whither Vocational Education?
- Spending in Schools Falls Again
- How Enthusiastic Are Students About School?
- Flint Water Crisis Draws Back Curtain on Community Disinvestment
- PISA: Leaning, or just a Tower of Babel?
- Reasons to Love Public Education

ESSA Poses Capacity Challenges for States

The Every Child Succeeds Act rolls out long-overdue changes that dramatically alter the accountability and authority granted to State Education Agencies. But do SEAs have the capacity and capabilities to handle their new duties?



Sen. Alexander (I) and Rep. Kline discuss ESSA

States wanted the power to come up with their own evaluations and accountability plans. But according to a January account by Daarel Burnette II in [Education Week](#), State Education Agencies are little more than "poorly organized and thinly staffed clearinghouses" for compliance with federal mandates - and many have been downsized in budget cuts following the 2007-2009 recession.

Now that states have a measure of autonomy in setting policy, do they have the capacity to follow through? Many think not. Patrick Murphy, director of research at the Public Policy Institute of California worries that having won this new authority, SEAs will be like the proverbial dog that caught the car it had been chasing.

Failing Grade for State Takeovers

Katherine Dunn and Kent McGuire of the Southern Education Foundation

take on the perception of "successful" state takeovers in Louisiana and Detroit, where research shows that "Opportunity School Districts" have turned out to be anything but. In an [Education Week](#) commentary they caution policymakers in Georgia and Pennsylvania not to follow the fool's gold of takeover procedures.



In Louisiana, where the nation's first all-charter school district implemented the model in 2003, the state took over public schools in the wake of Katrina, turning administration over to private charter operators. The results were plummeting test scores, overcrowding,

longer commutes to school, a bewildering gauntlet of enrollment procedures, and a high rate of push-out, along with increasing stratification of students by race and class.

Michigan's experience in Detroit was, if possible, even more troubling. It started, say Dunn and McGuire, as a state takeover of an existing state takeover, and ended with a staff turnover of nearly 40 percent and a federal corruption probe.

Finally, report the authors, independent investigations are revealing that most states have little capacity (there's that word again) to monitor how private charter administrators are spending public money. Shortcomings here open up the public treasury to rampant fraud, waste and abuse. In a telling conclusion, they note, "Whether the arrangement is called a portfolio district, a recovery district, or, most egregious, an 'opportunity' or 'achievement' district, the goal of these policies is the same: the transfer of local, public funds and decisionmaking to nonaccountable, often remote- or chain-charter operators."

Whither Vocational Ed?

Over the last few decades, school policy has become almost exclusively focused on college preparation. If our students don't prepare for college, test well, and get a degree, the thinking goes, they are considered failures. But what about the students who don't enroll in college? Or those who enroll, don't finish, and leave with crushing debt and no degree?

A recent PBS News Hour speculates that renewed interest in vocational education might be the answer for students who don't feel they are cut out for

academics and are looking for trade skills to take them into the workplace.



Justin Meeks, hired the day after graduation, learned metal fabrication.

It's a tricky issue. Career and technical education, or "CTE" programs, allow high school students to gain technical skills in a variety of career fields while also taking traditional classes like English and math. That permits some students to follow a different path than the traditional college path.

Some worry about a danger of encouraging students with behavioral issues or learning

disabilities to enroll in CTE programs. New approaches may bridge the gap. Unlike vocational programs of old, which often "tracked" students based on factors like economic status or race, the key to new vocational career-focused curriculum would be to present options to young people, and encourage them make their own decisions. See the full story, [here](#).

Spending in Nation's Schools Falls Again

If you were dismayed by the recent report [from the Washington Post's Emma Brown](#) pointing out that per-pupil spending declined in 2012 for the second straight year, additional light is shed on this troubling development via state-by-state analyses.

For example, [Chris Duncombe and Michael Cassidy of Virginia's Commonwealth Institute](#) report that little-noticed changes in the state's funding formula have had the effect of reducing state support for schools by a staggering \$800 million annually since the 2008-09 school year. This was accomplished by capping the number of support staff, cutting support for equipment and travel expenses, ignoring inflation, and assuming a longer lifespan for school buses. Children are our future. But the effect of short-changing schools in the Old Dominion is likely to be broken-down buses in broken-down schools.



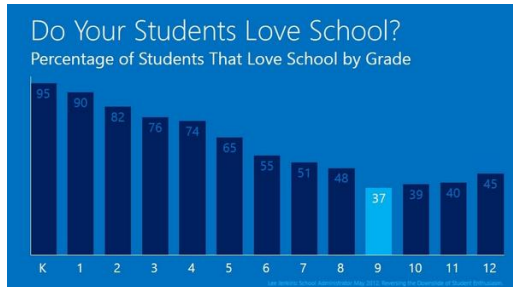
How Enthusiastic Are Students About School?

Do your students love school? It's the sort of question that would have driven school superintendent Thomas Gradgrind in Dickens' novel *Hard Times* right up the wall. Fancy and emotions were irrelevant to Thomas "facts, facts, facts" Gradgrind until, too late, he realized that emotions are life's balance wheel when his daughter suffered a breakdown.

The issue of how our most important customers view what we provide them is just as important to

school leaders as it is to captains of industry and commerce. And former school superintendent Lee Jenkins documented an alarming slide in student enthusiasm for school as students age in the May 2012 edition of [AASA's School Administrator](#).

Jenkins' article remains timely and deserves attention. It makes for compelling and troubling reading. He reports that, based on a survey of some 2,000 teachers, "for every year students are in school, fewer and fewer of them desire to be there.



The love of school

diminishes with

each passing year, going from almost 100 percent who love being in kindergarten to about a third who feel the same way about 9th grade."



This is how they look when they show up at our doors. How do they look as they leave?

Student satisfaction ratchets up modestly in high school, a phenomenon which Jenkins speculates may be due to the "light at the end of the tunnel," the availability of electives, and the absence of discontented dropouts. Still, even the high school results provide no cause for celebration. These findings should be cause for concern on the part of school leaders everywhere.

Flint Water Crisis Draws Back Curtain on Community Disinvestment

There's been an antiseptic quality to the school reform discussion over the last 30 years, as if we were somehow talking about school failure in the context of "Leave it to Beaver" communities and prosperous neighborhoods. But the [Flint Water Crisis](#) has drawn attention to a bleaker reality: Three decades of globalization and stingy domestic budgets have taken a toll in the form of community disinvestment across America. A British newspaper, *The Guardian*, has taken a penetrating look at the effects.

[The Guardian series](#) paints a stark picture of the economic realities in which communities struggle to meet student needs. [Beattyville, Kentucky](#), an Appalachian coal town, is blighted by joblessness and opiate addiction. In [Tchula, Mississippi](#), the poorest town in the poorest state in the union, manufacturing jobs disappeared along with segregation. Then

there's [Muniz, Texas](#), a border town where immigration papers make the difference between struggle and the promise of the American dream. And [Blackwater, Arizona](#), a reservation community, fights alcoholism, obesity, and ghosts from the American past.



East Buffalo, NY



Food bank in Beattyville, KY

The British newspaper describes [East Buffalo, New York](#) as a community abandoned to drugs, violence and despair as manufacturers headed south or overseas. As factory jobs dried up in [Selma, Alabama](#) people take whatever work they can get, including sorting bricks from demolished warehouses

that might be marketed to upscale homeowners elsewhere.

How is test-based accountability supposed to address these problems? And aren't the reformers who insist that "poverty is just an excuse" complicit in maintaining such situations, when their antiseptic reform proposals studiously ignore these devastating realities?

Is PISA Leaning? Or just a Tower of Babel?

In the United States, psychometricians and the US Department of Education hold up PISA assessment rankings as the gold standard by which to benchmark our competitiveness in the global economy. But recent rumblings in the international community point to cracks in the foundation of PISA (Program on International Student Assessment).

[The Times of London](#) looked into these international assessments, and suggested that the "snapshot approach" of PISA is fundamentally flawed. Academics interviewed for the story claimed that international rankings are based on a "profound conceptual error," using statistical techniques that are "utterly wrong," in support of what TES describes as a wrong-headed idea that is possible to rank education systems serving students in very different national circumstances.

PISA results for Shanghai, frequently conflated with China, have proven especially problematic, threatening the credibility of the entire exercise. [Brookings expert Tom Loveless](#) points out that the OECD's claims about China rest on shaky

*Ce n'est pas notre faute
si certains enfants de Shanghai
ne sont pas scolarisés à Shanghai !*



LAVIEMODERNE.NET

"It's not our fault if some children in Shanghai aren't provided with schools in Shanghai."

evidence from Shanghai, which discriminates against urban migrant children based on their housing status. **Modern Life in France** also investigated PISA results in **Shanghai**, and concluded that the scores were fishy: China's PISA results ignored not only the migrant students in Shanghai, but students in the provinces, and sometimes whole curricula and institutions, in the form of expensive "cram schools." Even the U.S. results are suspect, according to **Stanford's Martin Carnoy and Richard Rothstein** of the Economic Policy Institute.

Doubts about international comparisons are magnified by widespread reports of cheating throughout Asia. **In 2015, the BBC** provided alarming insights (right) of relatives and friends scaling buildings in India's Bihar Province to pass answers to students sitting for examinations. In 2013, **The Telegraph** in England reported on a riot in China's Hubei Province after teachers confiscated cell phones in an effort to block cheating. Students and parents chanted, "We want fairness. There is no fairness if you do not let us cheat." Allegations of cheating are serious enough that the **College Board** cancelled plans to administer at least one administration of SAT in China until the concerns were resolved.



Relatives help students cheat in Bihar




Students are tested in Yan'An, China

Is PISA the gold standard in assessment or a leaning tower? Is it based on a "profound conceptual error"? Does a culture of cheating or gaming tests corrupt the entire effort? Regardless of how those questions are answered, two issues are especially worrisome. First, PISA data may not be providing reliable comparisons of school outcomes

across countries. Second, even if these data were demonstrably reliable, American policymakers and the public should think twice before they import the concept that permeates education throughout much of Asia: schools are testing factories.

Reasons to Love Public Education

Public Education: Because no one wants to live in a country full of stupid people.

A photograph of John Green, a man with glasses wearing a light blue suit and a yellow tie, speaking into a microphone at a podium. He is holding a blue book in his left hand. The background is dark.

Public education does not exist for the benefit of students or the benefit of their parents. It exists for the benefit of the social order.

We have discovered as a species that it is useful to have an educated population. You do not need to be a student or have a child who is a student to benefit from public education. Every second of your life, you benefit from public education.

So let me explain why I like to pay taxes for schools, even though I don't personally have a kid in school: it's because I don't like living in a country with a bunch of stupid people.

— John Green

[FACEBOOK.COM/OURTIMEORG](https://www.facebook.com/ourtimeorg)

via Flickr.com/Genevieve719

Roundtable's 2016 Semi-Annual Meetings

Getting Organized to Help Kids -- The Roundtable's "Iceberg effect" report



indicates that the U.S. has the largest proportion of low-income children in the developed world. They live with remarkably high levels of stress and little support for families. This July 15-17 meeting will gather near Union Square to foster greater collaboration with units of general purpose local government.

School Governance -- October 7 -9 will find the Roundtable in Washington, D.C., to examine school governance. What do superintendents, boards, and unions need to do to get their act together to improve outcomes for students? The meeting will be held near the national capital's historic Rock Creek Park.



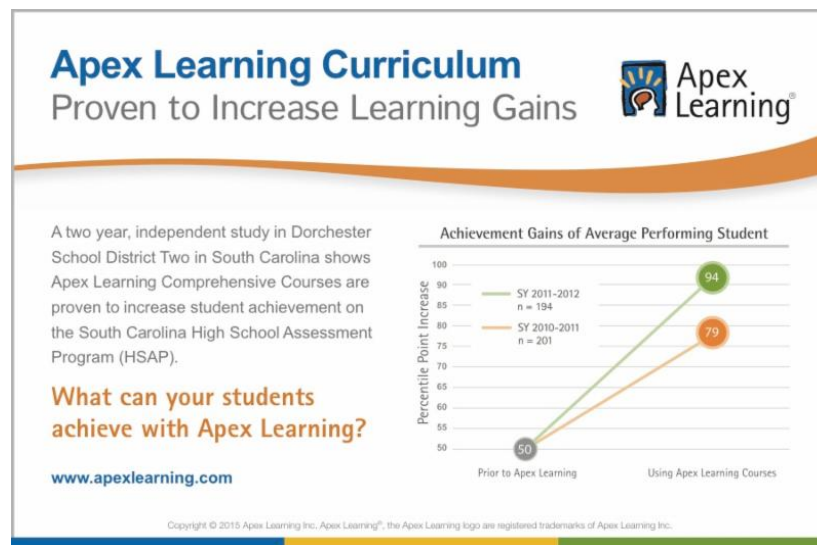
New Members

We are pleased to note several new members who have joined the Roundtable for 2016. They include:

- Jeffrey Baier, Los Altos, California
- Yvonne Caamal Canul, Lansing, Michigan
- Charles Dumais, Woodbridge, Connecticut
- John D. Ewald, Caroline County, Maryland
- Mary Kay Going, Moreland, California
- Laura Kagy, Attica, Ohio
- Salah E. Khelfaoui, Lowell, Massachusetts
- John Kopicki, Altoona, Pennsylvania (new assignment)
- Tammy Mangus, Monticello, New York
- Ralph Marino, Jr., Hewlett-Woodmere, New York (new assignment)
- Thomas McMorran, Easton-Redding, Connecticut
- Thomas Parker, Ecorse, Michigan
- Alan Peterson, Merced, California
- Elizabeth Polito, Woodside, California
- Kathleen Smith, Brockton, Massachusetts
- Nikki Woodson, Indianapolis, Indiana
- Paul Zinni, Avon, Massachusetts

Welcome!

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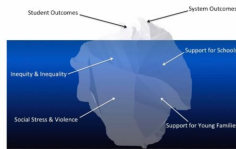




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School Performance in Context: Indicators of School Inputs and Outputs in Nine Similar Nations



January 2015

The National Black Leadership Initiative



Iceberg Effect Report

Free downloads or purchase copies [here](#).



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