

Introduction

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AS WE WRITE THESE WORDS, in the fall of 2016, educational policy makers in every part of the country are thumbing through the pages of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), poring over the related regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Education, and struggling to determine what it all means for the future of public schooling in their own states, districts, and towns.

ESSA makes a few things abundantly clear: to receive federal funding under the law, states must continue to abide by certain ground rules carried over from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) that aim to push school systems to provide all children with equitable opportunities to learn. For instance, states must hold all of their students to the same academic standards; test all students against those standards every year in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school; disaggregate and report the test results by race, income, disability status, and other variables; and take action to improve their lowest-performing schools.

On balance, though, ESSA is designed not to tell states what to do but, rather, to get the federal government to back off previous attempts to do

so. For example, the new law doesn't tell states how to hold schools accountable for low test scores, what tests to use, what criteria they should use to identify their lowest-performing schools, or what they should do to fix those schools. In fact, ESSA's congressional sponsors have expressly prohibited the U.S. Department of Education from trying to compel states to adopt specific policies or practices.

Hence the dilemma that local policy makers now face: After spending so many years trying to comply with a federal agenda for school improvement—focusing on standards setting, test-based accountability, teacher evaluation, and a handful of other strategies—are state superintendents, governors, legislators, school leaders, and others prepared to grab the wheel and pursue an agenda of their own? Given the opportunity to chart a new course for K–12 education, how in the world should they proceed?

In 2014, more than a year before ESSA was passed, Jobs for the Future, a national nonprofit that works to expand college and career success and build a more highly skilled workforce, commissioned a series of white papers by some of the nation's most well-respected educational researchers. Looking beyond NCLB, we asked them what it would mean for the public schools (high schools in particular) to embrace a truly ambitious and equitable mission. Rather than continuing to attach so much importance to student scores on shallow tests of reading and math, what if they were to set their sights on much worthier goals, such as the kinds of “deeper learning” that Barbara Chow describes in her foreword?

That is, what if education policy makers and practitioners were to agree that by the time young people complete high school, they should have a truly well-rounded set of knowledge and skills, including not just a solid grasp of academic content but also the ability to reflect on and direct their own learning, the ability to communicate effectively in diverse contexts, the confidence to debate competing views, and other capacities needed to be responsible classmates, coworkers, and citizens? And if schools were to place greater emphasis on such goals, then what kinds of school reforms would be most useful to consider?

These questions strike us as even more urgent and timely today, now that Congress has reined in the federal government's influence over educational decision making at the state and local levels. Critics have described ESSA as a purely negative piece of legislation, one that dismantles NCLB's

theory of change (especially the idea that strict accountability systems will create powerful incentives for schools to improve) but offers no new theory in its place. However, that makes it all the more important to share the kinds of research findings, recommendations, and principles that are discussed in the following chapters (which have been edited and revised from the original papers for this collection). If it will be up to state and local leaders to decide how best to proceed under ESSA—without having a theory of change imposed on them—then it will be critical for them to understand that today’s young people require much deeper and more powerful educational experiences than NCLB was designed to provide.

READINESS REDEFINED

In recent years, it has become a truism to say that, in the twenty-first century, the United States can no longer afford to maintain a twentieth-century school system, one that permits legions of students (mainly from low-income and/or minority backgrounds) to leave high school without a diploma or to graduate with only basic academic knowledge and skills. Once upon a time, young people could find a job and perhaps even make a good living in a factory or on a construction site, without higher education. But today, as policy makers are fond of saying, the goal of K–12 education must be to prepare every student to succeed in college *and* careers (which now require at least a year or two of postsecondary education) so they can at least support themselves and their families, if not live comfortably.

So what does that entail, precisely?

The phrase *college and career readiness* has become so familiar that it may strike some readers as a well-worn cliché. However, it is a relatively new term, and its meaning has evolved quite a lot over a short period of time. When it first came into popular usage roughly a decade ago, it was associated almost entirely with students’ *academic* preparation, having to do with their high school course taking, the rigor of the curriculum, and the alignment of twelfth-grade exit standards to the academic demands of first-year college courses. Even as recently as 2010, the authors of the Common Core State Standards equated the mastery of rigorous academic standards (at least in English language arts and mathematics) with becoming “ready for success” in college and the workforce.¹

Today, however, that understanding of what it means to be prepared for life after high school seems quaint—not because it is wrong so much as because it is *incomplete*.

For one thing, educational policy makers have become increasingly aware of research findings that show that students' performance in college has to do with much more than just their academic preparation. As David Conley describes in chapter 9, he and other researchers have found that while high school students' content knowledge and academic skills (such as the ability to organize new information, come up with interesting research questions, and grasp the fine points of an argument) certainly contribute to later success in college courses, so do a host of other capacities (such as goal setting, time management, and a willingness to consider new ideas), along with their knowledge of college planning, financing, campus norms, and the like.²

At the same time, policy makers have become increasingly familiar with similar findings from the research into career development. Beginning in the 1990s with the case for “soft skills” and codified more recently in the business-led twenty-first-century skills movement, workforce readiness has been redefined to include much more than just academic and technical preparation. For example, data collected over the past two decades from studies of U.S. workplaces and from large-scale surveys of employers point to a fast-growing need for workers who possess skills such as the ability to communicate and collaborate with diverse colleagues, solve complex problems, and adapt to changing contexts.³

Moreover, recent research in educational psychology has generated a wealth of important findings about the inter- and intrapersonal dimensions of learning (sometimes described as noncognitive or metacognitive skills, or social and emotional learning), calling attention to critical topics that were often absent from policy discussions during the NCLB era. Today, growing numbers of educators, policy makers, and researchers are steering discussions about school reform toward issues such as student motivation and engagement, the social environment of schools and classrooms, the effects of stress and bullying on adolescent development, the nature of productive persistence and academic mind-set, and the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world problems, among many others.⁴

Finally, and perhaps most important, it has become increasingly clear that millions of the nation's young people are facing challenges that cannot be addressed simply by raising academic standards and holding teachers and schools accountable for test scores and graduation rates. To be sure, many of NCLB's supporters conceived of the act as a civil rights bill, and it can still be argued that test-based accountability has a role to play in the larger effort to push schools to provide all children with meaningful opportunities to learn. However, gaps in Americans' income and wealth have only widened in recent years, with dire consequences for children growing up in poverty. Further, not only did most states cut per-pupil funding during and after the Great Recession, but researchers continue to find that, in many parts of the country, important educational resources are being distributed inequitably, resulting in starkly different learning environments for youth from different backgrounds. And at the same time, resource disparities are exacerbated by ongoing patterns of racial bias in decisions about school suspensions, referrals to special education, selection for gifted and talented programs, and other areas. In short, the present moment demands more serious and creative investments in supporting the nation's most vulnerable children (as Pedro Noguera, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Diane Friedlaender argue in chapter 4), such as efforts to create and fund new school and community services in distressed neighborhoods, monitor and address civil rights violations in public education, and ensure that basic skills instruction does not crowd out opportunities to learn higher-order skills and advanced content.⁵

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLING

In an earlier collection, *Anytime, Anywhere: Student-Centered Learning for Schools and Teachers* (published by Harvard Education Press in 2013), we focused on recent research into cognition, learning, youth development, and school improvement. Note, though, that we did not offer a prescriptive agenda for school reform. We are leery of reformers' past efforts to find, as the historian David Tyack put it, "one best system" for educating children.⁶ But we do find strong evidence to suggest that most schools

should do far more to support certain kinds of intellectual, social, and emotional development.

Specifically, we argue in *Anytime, Anywhere* that public education ought to provide adolescents with ample opportunities to (1) participate in ambitious and rigorous instruction tailored to their individual needs and interests; (2) advance to the next level, course, or grade based on demonstrations of their skills and content knowledge; (3) learn outside of the school building and the typical school day; and (4) take an active role in defining their own educational pathways.

The present volume comes at these issues from a somewhat different angle. Rather than focusing on research-based teaching practices (i.e., the *means* of supporting adolescents' developmental needs), we begin with a focus on the *ends* of secondary education. If college and career readiness (and civic readiness, we add) require students not just to master academic standards but to develop a more comprehensive set of intellectual, personal, and relational skills—that is, to learn deeply—then what does this mean for educational policy making? And how might this lead school reformers to rethink their priorities and turn their attention from a one-dimensional focus on standards and accountability to a deeper look at everything from improving teacher education and professional development to investing in college and career advising, student health services, bilingual education, work-based learning, school integration, support for students with disabilities, early college and dual-enrollment programs, community engagement, civic learning, and on and on?

We have organized this book into three broad themes:

1. *The purposes and goals of secondary education.* We begin with an overview chapter by Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine that explains how deeper learning fits into the historical trajectory of secondary schooling in the United States and why it could represent a truly new agenda for school reform, focusing simultaneously on educational excellence and equity. In chapter 2, Nancy Hoffman looks at deeper learning through its connection to career readiness, arguing that work-based education provides unique opportunities to learn deeply. And in chapter 3, Peter Levine and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg explore the intersection of civic readiness and deeper learning, demonstrating the essential role of deeper learning in our democracy.

2. *Access and opportunity.* In chapter 4, Pedro Noguera, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Diane Friedlaender ask what can be done to ensure that all students, regardless of their family income or racial/ethnic background, have meaningful opportunities to learn deeply. In chapter 5, Sharon Vaughn, Louis Danielson, Rebecca Zumeta Edmonds, and Lynn Holdheide look specifically at the supports and instructional strategies needed to help students with disabilities to learn deeply. And in chapter 6, Patricia Gándara focuses on English language learners and immigrant students, discussing both the hurdles they must overcome to learn deeply and the advantages that they bring to the table.
3. *School improvement for deeper learning.* To help students develop a combination of academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies, what must teachers know and be able to do, asks Magdalene Lampert in chapter 7—and how can they pull it off day after day in their classrooms? In chapter 8, Meredith Honig and Lydia Rainey examine what school system leaders can do to create the conditions under which such teaching and learning are possible. And in chapter 9, David Conley discusses the kinds of assessments that will be needed to guide teachers and students toward deeper learning outcomes.

We close, in chapter 10, with a review of policy principles and priorities to consider in the ESSA era, including recommendations offered by the authors of the preceding chapters and suggestions made by dozens of other researchers, practitioners, and policy experts that we have consulted with over the last two years.

We anticipate that this book will be of great interest not only to policy makers and advocates, but also to teachers, school and district administrators, journalists, university faculty members, and graduate students. While all of the chapters are strongly grounded in academic research, they are written in a nonacademic and highly accessible style, meant to offer readers a broad introduction to the given topic, highlight the most critical debates in the field, and provoke further discussion.

Finally, please note that this collection is not meant to promote “deeper learning” as a brand name or to advocate for a specific school model or policy initiative. As we referenced earlier, others may prefer to frame the discussion in terms of “social and emotional learning,” “twenty-first

century skills,” “metacognitive learning,” or other terminology. Rather than insisting that any one label is best, our goal is to encourage truly open-ended debate about the larger and more important question: If college, career, and civic readiness require more than just higher academic standards and tougher accountability—the focus of most education policy making over the last few decades—then what are the implications for schools, educators, and students?

Numerous examples of high-quality teaching practices, curricular materials, and other resources for student-centered teaching and learning are available (free of charge) at <http://studentsatthecenterhub.org>.