School Goals in a Era of Accountability: Getting Back to the Basics of Educating for Democracy

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Abstract

During an era dominated by NCLB-driven standards and accountability, more than 700 individuals, representing five subgroups, rated and rank-ordered 12 proposed goals for United States schools. Support for a broad-based set of academic, vocational, social/civic, and personal goals was affirmed; across the five subgroups, all 12 goals were rated "important" or "very important." The two most highly rated and ranked goals were "mastery of basic skills/fundamental processes" and "intellectual development." Analysis of the ratings data also yielded significant differences between the subgroups for the seven goals. The subgroup rankings of practicing K-12-based educators, parents with school-aged children, and school board members were in the closest agreement; the weakest correlations were for subgroup pairs that compared K-12 affiliated subgroups with university affiliated subgroups. The data did not support the assumed valuing of economic-related goals more than democracy-related goals nor did it support the valuing of individual-oriented goals over group-oriented goals.

Introduction

For nearly a decade, federally-originated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has arguably been the dominant issue addressed by P-12 schools. Conceptually, it is difficult to argue with a vision for schools that assures the educational needs of every child attending school will be met. Foster (2004) reminds teachers of their responsibility to educate all of the children—"not just those who come well-prepared, not just those who happen to like or excel at doing schoolwork, not just those whose backgrounds and experiences have made them well-suited for academic achievement" (p. 30). The importance of supporting every child who attends school is not a new thought; more than a century ago, John Dewey (1899) captured the essence of the NCLB vision: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy" (p.7).

Unfortunately, realizing the ideal set forth by NCLB has proven, thus far, to be extraordinarily difficult. One key stumbling block continues to be debate regarding the appropriate locus of control for schools. NCLB continues a trend, dating back more than 50 years to the landmark 1954 Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education court case, of making progressively more of the key decisions impacting P-12 schools at the state and national levels. While a strong case can be made for the appropriateness of many federal decisions, the relative loss of local control of schools is a cause of great concern. John Goodlad (1994) issues the following bold reminder of the importance of the local context in school decision-making:

> The purpose of the local school is to provide all the young with the education not provided elsewhere in the cultural context. The purpose of schooling is to support all the local schools in this endeavor. When the schooling machine takes over the purpose of the local school–as increasingly it has done in recent years–this democracy and its citizens are headed toward deep trouble. (p. 272)

Kohn (2003) also favors protecting the right of local communities to make decisions about schools. Kohn's rationale recognizes the widespread disagreement regarding what it means to be well-educated and that a single definition may never suffice.

A second stumbling block to realizing the promise of NCLB has come in the form of the devilish details that accompany NCLB's expectation that schools will accurately document both the extent and also the pace of student learning. Wiggins and McTighe (2008) are two of many educators currently lamenting the impact of emerging assessment practices upon the preparation of students for the world beyond the school; Wiggins and McTighe conclude that the common methods of teaching are not conducive to students' gaining a level of understanding that is deep enough to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to real–life situations. While the jury is still out, a worst case scenario is that efforts to implement and enforce NCLB will actually increase the number of children who leave schooling ill-prepared to succeed in society.

Determining what all of the children should learn is a third stumbling block for NCLB. In an increasingly diverse and technology-dominated "www.unitedstatessociety," the challenge of choosing what kids should know, believe, and be able to do, when the base of available information is exponentially increasing, is daunting but also of increasing importance. One feared outcome of NCLB is a narrowing of what is taught in schools (Dillon, 2006). Support for this viewpoint was presented in the 39th Annual Phi Delta Kappa and Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (2008); the poll revealed that 52 percent of Americans believe that No Child Left Behind is narrowing the curriculum in ways that limit what children are taught in subjects such as art, science, health, and social studies. The purpose for this study is to investigate this third stumbling block; the issue of what children should learn in school. What are the key goals for K-12 schools in the United States? To what degree, in the first decade of the 21st century, is there consensus regarding the goals for schools among parents, school board members, practicing K-12 teachers, college faculty, and teaching

candidates? A review of relevant literature precedes the presentation and analysis of data from a survey study involving 700+ individuals. In the final stages of the manuscript, recommendations are suggested.

Literature Review

A review of the relationship between two key terms, education and schooling, is an appropriate beginning point for exploring the goals for schools/schooling. Even though the public mind, according to Roland-Martin (2008), views education and schooling as nearly synonymous, schools are "but one element of a vast educational system" (p. 48) that can be detected in virtually all aspects of our lives including homes, neighborhoods, places for worship, clubs, museums, libraries, and recreation facilities. The fact that education, as compared to formal schooling, never ends is another distinguishing difference. This quality is posited by both John Dewey (1916), who equated education with growth and John Goodlad (2006), who defined education as a lifelong process of becoming. The broader range of focus is a third quality that distinguishes education from schooling. Cremin (1975), for example, defines education, like schooling, as being "deliberate, systematic, and sustained" but whose broad purposes include efforts "to transmit or evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities" (p. 1).

Positioning schools/schooling as a subset beneath the broader construct of education sets the stage for exploring the goals for schools/schooling. Goodlad (1979) suggests three possible lenses that might be used to determine school goals: (1) what schools "are asked to do;" (2) what schools "actually do;" or (3) what schools "ought to do." Each of these lenses has merit; collectively, they illustrate the complexity of determining school goals. The complexity associated with selecting school goals is further exacerbated by the fact that schools do not operate in a vacuum. The goals set are impacted by changing conditions within United States society. Schools have always been perceived to be a part of the solution to the challenges faced by society. Teaching citizens basic literacy skills, for

example, was a critical need in the early years of the new United States democracy. The expectation that schools can help solve societal problems has not abated. Rather, Goodlad (1979) observes that schools have been asked to take an increasingly more direct and substantial role in addressing societal imperfections.

Given these confounding variables, it is not surprising to learn that there is great diversity in perspectives regarding school goals. Many positively stated visions for school goals have been put forth. Littky's (2004) "real goals" for schools, which combine skills-oriented goals (in academics, thinking, and collaboration) with dispositions-oriented goals (i.e., passion, risk-taking, caring, perseverance, moral courage, and integrity), are one illustration of a positively stated vision. Throughout history there have also been cynical, critical perspectives regarding school goals. At a time when compulsory attendance laws were enacted, for example, Inglis (1918) contended that the goals for schools were oriented toward docility, conformity, training, and sorting. Two specific issues are especially prevalent in the conversation regarding school goals. Both issues, framed as dichotomies, are real and are evident within school policies, practices, curriculum, and instruction.

The first issue contrasts goals focused on economic issues (i.e., preparing youngsters for the world of work) with goals designed to prepare youngsters for citizenship in a democratic society. Support for the economic view is long-standing. In 1885, Education Commissioner William Torrey Harris admonished citizens that children must attend common schools or the U.S. would be unable to compete with other nations. A few decades later, Bobbitt (cited in Callahan, 1962) argued that the business community should set the standards for schools. The 1950s cold war induced Russian launching of Sputnik resulted in school goals designed to increase America's economic and military power. A similar response by schools occurred in the 1980s when the *A Nation at Risk Report* (1983) declared, "Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world" (p. 1) and the National Governor's As-

sociation (1986) declared "better schools mean better jobs" (p. 8). Albeit written from non-supportive perspectives, Postman's (1995) cleverly conceived God of Economic Utility and Cochran-Smith's (2006) argument that the primary purpose of public education is becoming increasingly workforce-related lend additional credence to the notion that the economic perspective in education remains strong.

The alternative perspective for this dichotomy posits that preparing youngsters for citizenship in a democratic society is a crucial goal. In 1813, Thomas Jefferson (1975) was among the first to emphasize citizenship preparation when he proposed a public system of schooling. Two hundred years later, the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) describes an agenda for schools and schooling focused primarily on preparing youngsters for life in a social and political democracy (Darling-Hammond, 1997). This perspective recognizes the crucial relationship between democracy and education/schooling. Goodlad (2008) describes public schooling as "the essential starting point for addressing the well-being of democracy" (p. 19) while Benjamin Barber (1997) describes public schools as the "forges of our citizenship and the bedrock of our democracy" (p. 22). The mission/vision statement of the NNER provides an incentive for critically reflecting about Westbrook's (1996) observation that "American public schools have become a vast variegated system that funnels human capital into the hierarchies of the undemocratic world of modern work" (p.135).

The second dichotomous issue contrasts school goals directed toward maximizing development of the individual with goals oriented toward preparing youngsters to make responsible contributions in support of the common good of all (Goodlad, 1996). On the one hand, individualism has been a cornerstone for much of United States history. European-based writers from the 18th century, including Rousseau (1974), declared that education should encourage the full development of the human being in ways that permit self-expression while avoiding repression and conformity. The Bill of Rights to the U. S. Constitution exemplifies the degree to which the

preservation of individual freedom was a critical component in early visions of a democratic society. Even Dewey (1916), one of the great cheerleaders for the common good, supported education for self-realization in a manner that challenged the notion that education is all about responsibility—to God, country, home, and job.

A strong case is likewise made by those who believe that school goals should teach youngsters to promote and protect the common good of all. Dewey (1916) and Apple and Beane (1995) are among the many who recognize the worth and wisdom of maintaining a staunch commitment to core democratic ideals which promote the common good of all. One rationale for promoting the common good of all relates to the remarkable diversity of United States society. In the first years of the 19th century, Webster (2009) stressed the role of education in developing a common national identity. A few centuries later, Barber (1997) argued that schools "must turn a host of 'everyones' into something like a single national One" (p. 26). A second rationale for goals which support the common good of all is recognition of the risks associated with extreme individualism. Theobald and Newman (1994) argue that a highly individualized approach to schooling, as opposed to the communitarian approach they support, too often results in individual rights becoming superior to what is good. Goodlad (1994) provides a third rationale when he argues that "what is truly good in the long run for each individual citizen comes about when people choose the common weal, the overarching public good, as their first priority in making decisions about schools and other social issues" (p. 1).

On balance, the literature indicates that the goals for schools/ schooling should be inclusive enough to address economic and democratic concerns and to also reflect a commitment to both the individual and the common good of all. Support for this assertion is provided by John Goodlad. In his book, *What Schools are For* (1979), Goodlad recommended 12 goals for United States schools that resulted from a review of the goals put forth by various state and local boards of education and special commissions. Goodlad categorized these goals into four categories—academic, vocational, social/civic,

and personal. The twelve goals included: 1)Mastery of basic skills or fundamental processes; 2) Career education-vocational education; 3) Intellectual development; 4) Enculturation; 5) Interpersonal relations; 6) Autonomy; 7) Citizenship; 8) Creativity and aesthetic perception; 9) Self-concept; 10) Emotional and physical well-being; 11) Moral and ethical character; and 12) Self-realization.

Program Description

This study was conducted at a public institution of higher education that has prepared teachers for more than a century. The institution became a member of the National Network of Educational Renewal (NNER) in 1996. Since joining the NNER, undergraduate teacher education programs have been significantly influenced by the Agenda of the NNER – especially by the four moral dimensions: (a) enculturation of the young in a social and political democracy; (b) providing access to knowledge for all children and youths; (c) practicing pedagogical nurturing; and (d) ensuring responsible stewardship of schools. The three featured program dispositions – reflective capacity, responsibility, and collaboration – are another indicator of commitment to democratic practices. A key expectation for graduates is that they will be committed to preparing youngsters for leading successful, engaged lives in a democratic society.

Research Design

A survey instrument reflecting Goodlad's 12 proposed goals for schools in the United States was developed. Individuals representing five distinct groups were invited to complete the survey: (a) practicing K-12 teachers and administrators; (b) teaching candidates enrolled in an introductory education course whose curriculum reflect the NNER Agenda; (c) university faculty teaching education courses, disciplinary content courses, and/or general studies courses for education majors; (d) parents with children attending a K-12 school; and (e) members of elected local K-12 school boards of education. Participation in the research study was voluntary, anonymous, and required informed consent. Prior to completing a two part survey, respondents reviewed a description of each goal.

For task one of the survey, respondents used a four point Likert Scale to rate the importance of each of the 12 goals ("1" = extremely important and "4" = not important at all). For task two, respondents rank ordered the twelve proposed goals ('1" = most important goal and "12" = least important goal).

Seven hundred ten (710) individuals responded to the survey. The data were entered into Excel and analyzed using SPSSX. For the task one data, overall mean scores and mean scores for each subgroup were calculated. A two way ANOVA was used to check for significant differences between sub-groups (p< .01). For the task two data, the overall rank ordering of the 12 goals was determined. The rank ordering of the 12 goals by each subgroup was also calculated. A Spearman's coefficient correlation was performed in order to determine the degree of similarity of responses for each of the 10 possible sub-group pairings.

Presentation of the Data

Participants responded positively to each of the 12 goals; as per the four point Likert scale, where the lower the mean score the higher the importance, the overall mean scores for each goal fell within the "very important" to "important" range. The overall mean scores varied from 1.072-1.958. The mean score exceeded 2.0 for only nine of the 60 data cells (12 purposes x five groups of respondents). The highest subgroup mean score, indicative of the least important purpose, was 2.409.

Overall, mastery of basic skills/fundamental processes (overall mean score = 1.072) and intellectual development (overall mean score = 1.190) were rated the most important. At the other extreme, the mean scores for four of the goals exceeded 1.80; self-realization (1.958), enculturation (1.829), self concept (1.821) and creativity (1.811). The overall mean scores for the six remaining proposed goals ranged from 1.498-1.710.

Table 1

Rating and Rankings of the 12 Goals for United States Schools-Overall and by Sub-Group

Proposed School Goal	K-12 Educators (n = 328)	Teaching Candidates (n = 150)	University Faculty (n = 59)	K - 12 Parents (n = 151)	School Board (n = 22)	Overall Mean Score (N = 710)
Mastery of Basic Skills/ Fundamental Processes	Rate 1.030 Rank 1	1.142 1	1.067 2	1.039 1	1.000 1	1.072 1
Career/ Vocational Ed	Rate 1.580 Rank 5	1.858 12	2.133 10	1.645 3	1.545 3	1.710* 6
Intellectual Development	Rate 1.163 Rate 2	1.277 2	1.050 1	1.191 2	1.091 2	1.190 2
Enculturation	Rate 1.852 Rank 11	1.561 4	1.883 9	2.092 12	2.091 10	1.829* 11
Interpersonal Relations	Rate 1.483 Rank 4	1.628 5	1.917 8	1.717 5	1.727 7	1.606* 4
Autonomy	Rate 1.471 Rank 6	1.736 9	1.700 5	1.546 6	1.727 5	1.580 5
Citizenship Preparation	Rate 1.535 Rank 7	1.764 8	1.700 6	1.809 8	1.727 8	1.679 8
Creativity/ Aesthic Perception	Rate 1.801 Rank 10	1.784 10	1.700 3	1.888 10	2.091 9	1.811* 9
Self-Concept	Rate 1.782 Rank 9	1.601 7	2.183 11	1.934 9	1.909 11	1.821* 10
Emotional/ Physical Well-Being	Rate 1.637 Rank 8	1.662 6	1.967 7	1.743 7	1.727 6	1.685 7
Moral/Ethical Character	Rate 1.441 Rank 3	1.419 3	1.783 4	1.612 4	1.500 4	1.498* 3
Self- Realization	Rate 2.006 Rank 12	1.682 11	2.250 12	2.039 11	2.409 12	1.958* 12

Significant differences in subgroup ratings with p<.01.

A two way Anova was performed on the task one ratings data to determine if there were subgroup differences for each of the 12 goals. This test yielded statistically significant differences (p <.01) for seven of the 12 proposed school goals: career education-vocational education; enculturation into U. S. society; interpersonal relations; creativity and aesthetic perception; self-concept; moral and ethical character; and self-realization.

To better understand the significant differences in subgroup ratings for each of these seven proposed goals, the mean scores for each subgroup were compared. Because the level of statistical difference was reflective of the range between the highest and lowest subgroup means, the high and low means for each item were of particular interest. Twelve of the 14 possible highest and lowest means were attributed to three of the subgroups; university faculty, undergraduate teaching candidates, and school board members. University faculty rated creativity/aesthetic perception more important than any other subgroup but university faculty also considered the following goals less important than the other subgroups: career education/vocational education; interpersonal relations; self-concept; and moral/ethical character. Undergraduate teaching candidates considered the following four goals more important than any other subgroup: enculturation; self-concept; moral/ethical character; and self-realization. School board members considered career educational/vocational education more important than any other subgroup. At the other extreme, school board members rated the creativity/aesthetic perception goal and the self-realization goal less important than any other subgroup.

Analysis of the task two data, respondents' rank ordering of the 12 proposed goals from most important (ranked 1st) to least important (ranked 12th), is also summarized in Table One. Consistent with the rating data, the goals of mastery of basic skills/intellectual processes and intellectual development were deemed most important by all five sub-groups. Four sub-groups ranked mastery of basic skills and fundamental processes most important and the intellectual development goal second in importance. Only university faculty members considered intellectual development more important than mastery of basic skills/fundamental processes.

An additional four goals were also similarly ranked by all subgroups. The moral and ethical character goal ranked third overall and was ranked third or fourth by all five subgroups. Two of the goals ranked in the lower middle range by all subgroups; the emotional/physical well-being goal ranked 7th overall and was ranked 6th, 7th, or 8th by all subgroups and the citizenship goal ranked 8th

overall and was ranked 6th, 7th, or 8th by all subgroups. The self-realization goal was ranked 12th overall and was ranked 11th or 12th by all subgroups.

For the remaining six goals, the rankings of the subgroups were more varied. The range in rankings for the career education/vocational education goal, ranked 6th overall, was from a 3rd place ranking by parents to the 12th and 10th place rankings by undergraduate teaching candidates and university faculty. Creativity/aesthetic perception, ranked 9th overall, was ranked 3rd by college faculty but ranked 9th or 10th by all other subgroups. Subgroup rankings for the enculturation goal, 11th overall, ranged from a 4th place ranking by undergraduate teaching candidates to a 12th place ranking by parents. Autonomy, ranked 5th overall and also ranked 5th most important by the university faculty and school board member subgroups, was ranked 9th by undergraduate teaching candidates. The self-concept goal ranked 10th overall but the subgroup rankings ranged from a 7th place ranking by undergraduate teaching candidates to an 11th place ranking by school board members and university faculty. Interpersonal relations ranked 4th overall but the subgroup rankings varied from a 4th place ranking by P-12 educators to an 8th place ranking by university faculty.

A Spearman's correlation coefficient test was performed in order to determine the degree of similarity of rankings across sub-groups. With 1.0 indicating a perfect correlation between sub-group rankings, the range of correlations for the ten possible paired correlations was .44-.94. The correlations for three sub-group pairings were remarkably high: (a) parents and K-12 educators (.97); (b) parents and school board members (.94); and (c) K-12 educators and school board members (.91). The correlations for five of the subgroup pairs ranged from .56 to .67: university faculty and parents (.56); K-12 educators and undergraduate teaching candidates (.59); undergraduate teaching candidates and university faculty (.60); K-12 educators and university faculty (.64); and university faculty and school board members (.67). Two correlations were the least similar; both yielded correlations of less than .50. The correlation for the undergraduate teaching candidates and parents pairing was .44 and the correlation

for the undergraduate teaching candidates/school board member pairing was .46.

Discussion and Recommendations

Arguably, the most striking insight revealed by data analysis was the high level of importance assigned to each of the 12 proposed goals; respondents rated each goal in the "important" or "very important" categories. Given the specific context for this study, a rural setting in a Midwestern state, this study should be replicated in a variety of urban, suburban, and rural contexts across the United States. The purpose for replication would be to ascertain the degree to which support for a broad based set of academic, vocational, social/civic, and personal goals is characteristic of United States society. Evidence regarding the level of support for the various goals provides valuable input for policy-makers, educators, and citizens charged with making school decisions.

The overall high level of support for each of the 12 proposed goals is particularly good news for those who favor broader sets of school goals. With regard to the dichotomy which pits school goals oriented toward preparing youngsters for the world of work versus goals for preparing youngsters for democratic living, this study challenges the perspectives put forth by Postman (1995) and Cochran-Smith (2006); the evidence suggests that respondents did not value economic-motivated goals more than other goals. Rather, the data lends credence to the more expansive democratic position; 700+ respondents expressed solid support for a broad-based list of school goals that encompass economic, democratic, social/civic, and personal domains. This study provides hope and encouragement for schools and communities who resist the narrowing of school goals in the face of the current NCLB-dominated context.

With regard to the second dichotomy noted in the literature review, debate over the relative importance of goals directed toward maximized development of individuals as opposed to goals designed to promote the common good of all, the fact that all the goals were positively supported suggests that respondents recognized positive benefits to individual and group goals. Efforts to categorize the

goals into distinct categories of individually-oriented and group-oriented goals produced interesting contrasts. Two goals most easily aligned with the development of the individual, autonomy (4th) and career education-vocational education (5th) were among the most valued goals but three other individual-oriented goals, emotional and physical well-being, self-concept, and self-realization, ranked 7th, 9th, and 12th respectively. The pattern of ranking for the three goals most closely aligned with the common good of the group was similarly varied; interpersonal relations, citizenship preparation, and enculturation into a democratic United States society ranked 4th, 8th, and 11th respectively.

One interpretation for this pattern of rankings is to conclude that the 12 proposed goals are not particularly discriminating in terms distinguishing between individual and group-oriented goals. Another interpretation is that the individual versus common good dichotomy is artificial; it is plausible that individual growth and the common good of all are more connected than they are separate. Support for the notion that what is good for the individual, properly directed, is also good for the common weal, is especially evident in the literature which supports the need for schools that prepare youngsters for engaged participation in a democratic society. Dewey (1916) linked the individual and collective when he remarked that education should be structured in a manner that enables an individual "not just to be good but to also be good for something." Darling-Hammond (1997) espoused a similar interconnectedness: "A democratic education should enable all people to find out and act on who they are, what their passions, gifts, and talents may be, what they care about, and how they want to make a contribution to each other and the world" (p. 45). Finally, Goodlad (1979) rejected what he perceived to be "vacillation, every few years, from excessive attention to individuality to excessive attention to responsibility for our society's welfare" (p. 13). Goodlad went on to argue that education should cultivate both individuality and responsibility. It makes good sense for schools to incorporate language in their goal statements that identify, but also explicitly link, individual goals with group goals.

While all 12 goals were considered important or very important, statistically significant differences in subgroup ratings for seven of the 12 goals and also the substantial variation in correlation coefficients across subgroup pairings for the ranking data, suggests that additional dialogue is needed in order to clarify understandings and to more fully explore differences in perspective for the following most disputed goals: Career education/vocational education; enculturation; interpersonal relations; creativity/aesthetic perception; self-concept; moral/ethical character; and self-realization. Ideally, these conversations should bring together practicing K-12 educators, parents of school-aged children, school board members, university-based educators, and future teaching candidates. The interactions would likely be rich and the results compelling as more broadly shared understandings are achieved.

Conclusion

This study, which provided 700+ Americans with an opportunity for pausing to reflect about the importance of 12 proposed academic, vocational, social/civic, and personal goals for schools in the United States, makes a contribution to the literature regarding school goals. The fact that respondents conveyed solid support for each of the proposed goals encourages schools to set broad-based goals. While the importance of two goals, mastery of basic skills/fundamental processes and intellectual development was especially evident, data analysis also yielded statistically significant differences in how the five subgroups rated and ranked seven of the proposed goals. Opportunities for diverse groups of individuals, especially those who view school goals through different lenses, are necessary for delving deeper into issues surrounding goals and differences.

The study was well-timed; in the first decade of the 21st century United States schools are navigating a climate that places an unusually high priority upon learning standards and high stakes/high accountability assessment practices. This climate is reflective of the key stipulations contained in No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Few will argue (publicly at least) that efforts to advance fundamental American values, such as equality and justice for all, are wrong-

headed. Unfortunately, not all of the results of even the most well-intentioned efforts to implement NCLB are positive. One key risk in the current climate is that goals for schools will be too narrowly focused. While a narrowing strategy is understandable, given that narrowing the scope eases the demands of accountability for student performance, what might be lost in the process are goals deemed essential for holistic development of the individual and also necessary for protecting the long term future of a society that aspires to remain democratic and to inch ever closer to realizing democratic ideals.

Fortunately, as with all storms, silver linings to the standards and accountability movement can be found. It is possible that NCLB, a piece of legislation that severely challenges existing teaching and curricular practices and has also laid bare deep, often overlooked systemic inequities, generates sufficient energy to mobilize Americans to more actively engage with the enterprise of schooling. Increased engagement, preferably originating at the local level and moving forcefully upward, would depart from what Goodlad (1979) describes as both a chronic neglect of education and impatience on the part of Americans when it comes to thinking and talking about what we are doing in schools and where schools are going.

The timing for this study further illuminates the complexity of setting goals for schools. In terms of the number and types of goals that were featured in this study, answers to the following important questions are necessary:

- Are all of the potential goals for schools of equal value or are certain goals "first among equals?"
- How many goals can a school reasonably pursue given the need for explicit and extensive assessment of student progress?
- Will it be possible to create a sustainable and manageable plan for accomplishing a broad-based set of goals which reflects an awareness of key variables such as age and developmental appropriateness and alignment with the curriculum but also meets the need for adequate yearly progress?

- How possible will it be, for each of the chosen goals, to document a level of student performance data that is deemed acceptable by policy-makers, parents, and the larger community?
- What are the best instruments and the best strategies for effectively assessing goals that are not easily reduced to the level of basic skills or the lowest end of taxonomies of learning/thinking?

Questions such as these are likely to dominate current and future conversations about school goals. The way these questions are answered will help chart the future of the United States education system. For those who are committed to advancing the agenda of democracy within United States schools, certain kinds of answers must be ratified. Often, these answers will run counter to existing practices. Theobald and Newman (1994) provide one illustration of an alternative narrative which supports democratic purposes for schools:

> It is in the area of assessment that the notion of individuals as discrete and separate entities takes shape in today's schools. Our children are tested hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times throughout the course of a K-12 education, and in practically every instance they are completely and totally on their own. It is so dramatically unlike anything else they will encounter in life that it should make us, at the very least, stop to wonder why we do it. But the vast majority of citizens in this country never give it a second thought . . . If the public educational enterprise were construed along lines consistent with communitarian thinking then the practice of assessment would look vastly different. Students might be asked to engage in work with peers that could engender significant understandings while the group is assessed as a whole. (p. 10)

What is needed is a vision of school goals predicated upon fostering the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for engaged living in a democratic society. This vision is not new; it dates back to the earliest days of United States history. Putting democracy in the forefront of school renewal would be a fine illustration of a "back to the basics" movement!

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