



Meeting Summary

International Competitiveness

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Ensuring Future American Exceptionalism

Session 321, ECS National Forum on Education Policy
July 2009

William “Brit” Kirwin, Chancellor of the University System of Maryland, discussed [Coming to Our Senses: Education and the American Future](#), a recent report he helped write. The report details how the United States is losing its status as the world leader in the educational attainment of its citizenry. While Kirwin notes that this is well known in education-policy circles, the report lays out some specifics. For example, the United States:

- Ranks 23rd in high school completion rates
- Ranks 10th in postsecondary completion rates
- Has the highest college dropout rate of any industrialized nation
- Has a postsecondary degree attainment rate of about 40% for the 25-to-34 year-old cohort
- Is the only industrialized nation with a declining college completion rate
- Could drop the current 40% degree rate to 29% by the year 2025, if we stay on our present course.

Report Recommendations:

- Make voluntary preschool available to all children from families at or below 200% of the poverty level
- Make a major investment in professional counselors at the middle school level
- Establish college prep curriculum as the default high school curriculum nationally
- Align high school exit requirements with college entrance expectations
- Simplify the college admissions and financial aid processes
- Simplify the college transfer process
- Give much greater priority to teacher preparation programs at our nation’s colleges and universities
- Implement “best practice” strategies for college retention
- Invest in adult education programs.

Roy Romer, former Governor of Colorado and current Senior Advisor at the College Board, spoke about aligning to international standards. Romer noted that the largely centralized nature of our competitors’ education systems contrasts with our much more decentralized systems of education. It is a difficult undertaking to get consensus among and within the states. Currently, efforts are underway by several organizations, and a draft of standards is expected to be released shortly after the July 2009 ECS National Forum.

“Teachers teach to the test; If you have the right tests, this is not a problem.”

-Roy Romer

July-August 2009 will see a statement of what constitutes postsecondary English language arts and mathematics readiness, followed by a backward mapped way of setting this up at the K-12 level. The goal is to set up a voluntary, opt-in, decentralized way of allowing states to join together and adopt a common core. Participating states will be free to expand upon this common core as each sees fit.

We also need consensual effort to arrive at a common set of assessments. To share across state lines, such an effort could help raise the quality of state assessments. Romer emphasized the importance of quality assessments when he noted that “Teachers teach to the test; If you have the right tests, this is not a problem.”

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