



**ENSURING QUALITY STUDENT LEARNING IN  
A CHAOTIC EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

This E-Hint is related to the last issue, "How Can School Officials Respond to Critics of the CCSS?" It offers comments about our early 21<sup>st</sup> Century era in which the media are full of stories about how to improve the quality of America's schools. Those stories are typically based on opinions and actions taken by governmental and bureaucratic activists who believe they know how student learning can be improved. Recommendations and observations of the most visible and vociferous non-educators cover the extremes of every attitudinal spectrum. Here are examples of extreme assertions issued by people on each end of that spectrum:

**Most Prevalent Assertions**

Charter or independent schools should replace the nation's public school system to ensure better quality learning through vigorous competition and inventive programs.

The standards movement should be abolished as being intrusive and unnecessary; local districts and schools must have the right to create and implement their own curriculums.

High stakes criterion-referenced tests based on external standards, if those standards must exist at all, should be abolished.

Teachers should meet stronger criteria before employment, be evaluated for effectiveness in terms of how well their students learn, and be dismissed without the benefit of due process (tenure) if found inadequate.

The funding of schools and districts should be based on how well students perform (presumably on existing standardized norm-referenced tests), and success in post-secondary education and subsequent vocational pursuits.

**Opposing Assertions**

Charter schools are no more effective than public schools, so use of public funds to support them should be discontinued. Independent schools should not receive public funds.

The standards movement should be expanded and strengthened, but only by individual states, not by federal or national groups.

High stakes criterion-referenced tests should be based on state standards, rigorously administered, and used to ensure uniform and quality student learning in all schools.

Teacher preparation programs are already subject to meeting intense accreditation standards; state certification policies maintain quality; due process (tenure) laws should remain intact because they protect teachers from capricious accusations.

School accountability should be based on a combination of academic, vocational, sociological, and personal growth of students. Success in most of those domains must be measured by both quantitative and qualitative evaluations.

Compared to 50 years ago, today's schools receive an inordinate amount of attention from government and industry at both the state and national levels. At one time the public education system in this nation was funded and operated locally, with community residents and citizens actively involved in making what they considered to be good decisions and taking appropriate actions. Now, American kindergarten through grade 12 education programs are scrutinized, analyzed, and manipulated by members of the U.S. Congress, state governors, state legislators, and even the president of the United States. Then, there are those in the private sector who also convey their notions using personal wealth to ensure they are noticed.

### **Impact on American Schools and the People Who Work in Them**

As one might expect, professional educators who work in the American educational community are frequently confused and dismayed with the controversy swirling around them. Every time they pick up a newspaper or check news items online and in the electronic media, they see something about what is needed to "fix America's failing schools." Like many other issues in today's world, the assertions are often a product of polarized thinking and belief systems.

In many districts there are no effective organizational structures that insulate teachers and administrators from the maelstrom of criticism and sometimes malevolent commentary. Nor are there processes that help employees process the next initiative of a politician or legislative

body in suggesting new laws or policy mandates.

Are educators demoralized by all of this or have they simply become numb? It doesn't matter much because either condition results in professional men and women trying their best to serve students even if the system in which they work must lurch from one initiative to another to satisfy outside critics and questionable reform movements. What does matter in this chaotic education environment is that those men and women are unable to achieve professional viability, thereby slowly dismantling in their minds the idea that they really make a difference individually and collectively.

### **CLI Creates a More Positive Working Environment in Public Schools**

There are many organizations that help American public schools improve curriculum, instruction, and the preparation for student assessment. The Curriculum Leadership Institute is one of them. However, the foundation of the CLI Model has been and continues to be *academic program governance*. In other words, CLI has always advocated that no improvement process can be effective over time if school districts make decisions and take action using traditional methods for managing curriculum and instruction. Unfortunately, few others share CLI's intense focus on organizational culture using the body of knowledge offered by systems advocates like Michael Fullan, William Edwards Deming, Peter Senge, Edgar Schein, Abraham Maslow, and others who have studied the behaviors of human beings within groups.

So, the next time someone asks the purpose of an inclusive district curriculum coordinating council within the CLI Model, they can be told it is a forum for understanding the chaotic world around them, making decisions that keep the district on a course that best serves students, and

taking actions that carefully align with those decisions. It isn't meant to insulate educators from the controversies raging in the state and nation, but it does offer district stakeholders an opportunity to create a sensible and logical environment for helping teachers support quality student learning.