

## Introduction and Thanks

*Hello everyone, my name is Madeleine Webster and I'm here representing the National Conference of State Legislatures and a report we just released called No Time to Lose: How to Build a World Class Education System State by State. This report is the culmination of two years of study of the top performing countries in the world, and the lessons the U.S. might take from them. I'm joined by Senator Dave Sokola of Delaware and Representative Wendy Horman of Idaho, both of whom were key members of the study group and who are here to share their experience, insight and expertise with you, and to answer all of the hard questions.*

*Before I say any more I'd like to thank Rachel Gudgel for inviting me to talk about this exciting new report – it's received lots of national media coverage, been highlighted in numerous policy blogs, and it's beginning to get traction in the states. It's an honor and a pleasure to get to share this work with the New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee, and it's lovely to be in such a beautiful city and capital. Thank you.*

*I'm going to talk about the background and process that went into this report for about twenty minutes, then we'll turn to our two fine legislative experts who were part of this study for some Q&A. We'll have lots of time for questions, but know that you might be able to find some of the answers to your questions in the report itself, which I believe you have in front of you, and which you can always access at NCSL.org. Let's start with our three takeaways: states can learn from other countries, there are policies that's top performers have in common, and that there are immediate steps states can take to begin to implement those policies.*

## The Andreas Schleicher Presentation

*So all of this began three years ago at NCSL's 2013 Capitol Forum in Washington D.C., when a man named Andreas Schleicher of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (or the OECD) gave a deeply alarming presentation about the U.S. performance on the latest PISA scores. For those of you who maybe aren't familiar with the OECD or the PISA, the PISA is an assessment given to 15 year olds in 65 countries to assess their ability to apply their knowledge and skills in reading, math and science to real world problems. The OECD does a much better job explaining the PISA than I do, so we are going to watch a short clip to learn more.*

*Any questions about the PISA we can help with before we move on?*

*So back to the 2013 scores. The most concerning data from Mr. Schleicher's 2013 presentation is on the screen now – in 2012, the U.S. ranked 24<sup>th</sup> in reading, 38<sup>th</sup> in math, and 28<sup>th</sup> in science. There is a lot we can learn from the PISA data, but I'll draw out a few important points.*

- 1. After decades of reform, the U.S. was still only performing in the middle of the pack, and being outranked not only by most of the developed nations of the world, but a growing number of less-developed nations as well.*
- 2. These results illustrated that the U.S. doesn't do as good a job educating the most disadvantaged children as most advanced industrial countries.*
- 3. Lower percentages of U.S. students scored in the top quintile of performance, and higher percentages in the bottom quintile, which means we have problems on both ends of the achievement spectrum.*

*Naturally, legislators wanted to know: what are the top performing countries doing that we aren't? So NCSL convened a bipartisan group of legislators and senior legislative staff. With the help of our friends at the National Center on Education and the Economy, NCSL led a 2 year study of top performing countries listed there. We heard from 25 experts from around the world, looked closely at whole systems in Asia and Europe, and a few of our members even had an opportunity to visit schools in China.*

*We learned so much in these two years, both good and bad.*

*The bad news is threefold. One, we saw how our PISA scores and trends tell us that most state education systems are falling behind. It's not just PISA that tells us this, our own NAEP scores to do. One of the consequences of not being internationally competitive in education is not being internationally competitive economically. We've already seen evidence of this in another assessment of U.S. competitiveness called the PIACC, which assesses the skill levels of young adult workers. This is the second piece of bad news: the PIACC shows that only half of U.S. millennials are proficient in literacy, and only one third in numeracy, and that worst of all, the literacy and numeracy skills of U.S. workers has declined in the last two decades. Although I have to say I know of at least one millennial in this room who wasn't tested. The third piece of bad news is that we have not yet seen the improvements we hoped to see from the silver bullet and piecemeal approaches to reform we've implemented, and why that is, which I'll talk about in a moment.*

*The good news is twofold: First, after looking at top performing countries around the world, we discovered that there are policies these countries have in common that are not impossible to implement here in the U.S. This brings me to the second piece of good news - while comparing other top performers to the U.S. as a whole is statistically tricky, comparing states to the top performers, instead of the U.S. as a whole, is reasonable. Let me show you why.*

*One of the main points of concern that the study group worked through was the conception that top performing countries (especially the Asian countries) only educate their elite. This graph helps dispel that – these top performers graduate 80-90% of their population, not just the top students. This next graph looks at this question from a different angle – it shows the percentage of immigrant student in some of the top performers.*

## **The Recommendations**

*So while we are facing an urgent problem here in the U.S., it's not all bad news: there are elements that the top performing countries have in common. They are up on the screen now – strong early education, world-class teaching profession, rigorous career and technical education, and a comprehensive, well aligned system. Let me take a moment to break those out a bit.*

- 1. Our first element is early education: In the top performing countries, students show up to school ready to learn. Sometimes this means the government provides supports to children before and after they enter school. Once in school, the children who struggle the most receive the most support and resources, the most important of which are excellent teachers. The best teachers in these countries work in the most challenging schools.*
- 2. The second is that in the top performing countries, a world-class teaching profession supports a world class instructional system, where every student has access to highly effective teachers and is expected to succeed.*

*A big part of this is selective recruitment, where teacher candidates are selected from the top quartile of secondary school graduates.*

*The preparation and licensure programs in top-performing countries are designed around meeting reported vacancies, and admission rates are competitive. Programs take much longer to complete and are much more rigorous. Emergency certification does not exist.*

*Apprenticeships, mentoring and a reduced workload is expected for new teachers, and there are clear pathways up for teachers to move through.*

*Also very different is how teaching looks in the day-to-day classroom – in high performing countries, teachers only teach for about 30% of their time, and spend the remainder perfecting lesson plans, working in teams to reach struggling students, and on observation, evaluation and professional development – all as a team.*

*Schools in the top performing countries have highly trained and carefully chosen principals.*

*And finally, teachers in high-performing countries are more generously compensated – society invests in teachers as “nation builders.”*

*These world-class teaching professionals operate in world-class instructional systems, based on rigorous standards and that use high-quality assessments that assess high-level, complex skills.*

3. *The third element: In the top-performing countries, career and technical education is seen as a quality route to education, skills and well-paying jobs. Where CTE has declined in the U.S. in recent decades, top-performers like Switzerland and Singapore have developed strong CTE systems closely tied to industry needs.*
4. *Finally, and potentially most importantly, the top-performers have adopted comprehensive, system-wide reforms. They think of education policy not as a collection of silver bullets, but rather an ecology – a single system where success in one area is dependent on success on each other area in turn. These countries understand that more rigorous teacher preparation won't work without increasing teacher pay, that high-quality early childhood instruction without high quality instruction throughout the education continuum won't move the needle.*  
*States are well-positioned to create the kind of long-term, clear, unifying and lasting visions for their education systems that the top performing countries have built their success on. States can do this – there are a few states that have already begun.*

## **Where to Start**

*So we realize that between these four recommendations, we are asking quite a lot of states. We struggled quite a bit with this question within the study group: where to begin? The report lays out a few next steps states can take.*

- 1. Create a shared statewide vision – create a north star that your state and all its stakeholders buy into, one that can survive transitions in politics*
- 2. Benchmark your policies – compare your policies and practices to those of the high performers – learn where the big differences are, and identify specific policies and implementation strategies for necessary shifts in policy and practice.*
- 3. Get started on one piece – select a priority area and tackle it. A comprehensive system doesn't have to happen all at once, but is rather built over time with an understanding of how all the pieces come together.*
- 4. Work through the messiness – in both high-performing countries and here in the U.S., the work of system-wide reform is messy. High-performers work through this with their eye on their shared vision.*
- 5. Invest the time – system-wide reform will take time and require a bit of prioritizing.*