THE CASE FOR COMMON EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS
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The success of today's students will determine our nation's destiny. America's economic strength and standing in the world economy are directly linked to our ability to equip students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the 21st-century economy. Students are no longer competing with their peers in other cities—they are competing with students across the globe. Business leaders have become champions of education reform, recognizing the role that rigorous academic standards have on their success.

Yet in all but a very few states, current academic standards of educational performance are too low. A recent analysis by ACT, the respected national organization responsible for college admissions tests, concluded that three-fourths of the young men and women entering colleges "were not adequately prepared academically for first-year college courses." In other words, their high-school diplomas weren't worth the paper they were printed on.

This is not a winning formula. We must insist on standards that will prepare our high-school graduates for the demanding challenges they will face. And, while education is a national priority, the answer here does not appear to be a new federal program mandating national standards. States have historically had the primary responsibility for public education, and they should continue to take the lead.

The good news is that the states are stepping up. Recognizing our great need for more rigorous academics, state leaders and educators have come together to create model content standards. The Common Core State Standards were voluntarily developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, in collaboration with teachers, school administrators and math and English experts. The standards provide a framework of clear and consistent skills for math and English. Already some 43 states and the District of Columbia have signed up to adopt the standards for English and math in lieu of their previous requirements.

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The Common Core State Standards define what students need to know; they do not define how teachers should teach, or how students should learn. That is up to each state. And they are built on what we have learned from high-performing international competitors as well as the best practices in leading states.

For example, the Common Core State Standards focus on the math that matters most to achieve college and career readiness. The literacy standards require students to make arguments with evidence rather than just restate their own opinions or experiences.

Thus, research shows that rigorous mastery of fractions is crucial for later math performance. The Common Core State Standards provide clear grade-by-grade goals for what students should know about fractions, built on the best practices of high-performing countries. In literacy, what most predicts college readiness is the ability to read and understand complex texts. The Common Standards set clear benchmarks for each grade for students reading sufficiently complex texts in English, history/social studies, science and technical subjects.

New standards demand new measurements for achieving them and, once again, states are leading the way. Two consortia of states are currently working together to develop assessments of whether students are mastering the material.

It is the states' responsibility to foster an education system that leads to rising student achievement. State leaders, educators, teachers and parents are empowered to ensure every student has access to the best curriculum and learning environment. Governors and lawmakers across the country are acting to adopt bold education reform policies. This is the beauty of our federal system. It provides 50 testing sites for reform and innovation. The Common Core State Standards are an example of states recognizing a problem, then working together, sharing what works and what doesn't.

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