

TRANSCRIPT

Closing Remarks

SPEAKER Mike Kirst

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MIKE KIRST And I really did benefit from this a lot, and I've been saying we need more of these sort of things in California. And I think this has been such a successful meeting that we ought to really talk about duplicating it in other parts of the state with some focus on the south, of Southern California, which has the bulk of our students. So my perspective on what's transpired here is obviously going to be different from most of you that work at the local level, and obviously what one finds interesting will vary depending on your frame or reference. So I will make some comments on things that I found particularly interesting in that regard. You know, obviously the opening by Linda laid out the daunting task of alignment of policy and classroom implementation. This is a huge undertaking, and it involves just every type of policymaking we can think of, from, of course, there's standards development and materials, professional development, teacher training, and, of course, the assessment part and many other parts that were laid out. So this is another huge exercise in just state policy alignment. And then all of the work and alignment that must take place in the local level and all the players that must come together to make this work in the classrooms. That was really, I think, laid out very well in the sessions that I attended and in the overall things. And everybody came in with a realization that this isn't going to be easy and how much it will take.

Reflecting on that, a positive side is that if you look at the period after 2000, when our last standards involvement really kicked off under Governor Davis, we had a lot of money. I remember lots of money for professional development. We had algebra academies all over the state. We paid teachers \$25,000 for raising CST scores that they had no control over, really, but they got 25K anyway. I mean, it was just really a different era. But if you look at the results, we were able to align lots of state policy and then local implementation around a set of standards, for better or worse, around an assessment. We did align the materials. And you really implemented it in a way that had been unexpected from prior educational research, that this much would be happening in classrooms based on this much change in standards at the national and state level. So we have done something, somewhat similar, but of course this effort is much more complex and demanding than the prior effort in many ways,

particularly with English learners, with mathematics across the curriculum, and with the English language arts as well.

So the first thing I come in thinking about—and I’m still wondering as I leave that I was enlightened—was given the scale of California with, I think, 8,500 schools and about 330,000 teachers, it used to be 350. I’m estimating; I don’t really know how many we have now. How can we really scale up this effort and provide the resources to the local educators to make this work? It’s just a huge state, a huge scale, and that to me is—and I will make some further remarks on that—is still I got a lot of hints, but I think it’s still a bit of a puzzle in my mind. The history of educational reform in recent years has been that the higher levels, like the state, we ratchet up accountability a lot more than we build capacity. There’s a professor at Harvard named Richard Elmore, and he and I have worked for years together, and he had something what he called Elmore’s law. As you ratchet up accountability at the state level, you should ratchet up local capacity to equal that. And typically we haven’t done that, and we’re not going to be able to do that this time because of our financial constraints at least in the short run.

So I came into the conference thinking, how do I think about this scale problem and what can I learn from these local practitioners and teams that were put together here and our speakers about that? And I learned a lot; there’s lots of ideas on how to tackle this at this conference. I mean, we even got into detail, such as retrofitting open court with better questions. And people are thinking about that and the use of the late-start school, starting days to have a teacher in professional development. You know, school starts at 9 for two days and the teachers come in at 8 and in that regard. So that really is, I think, still a problem, but we did get a lot of suggestions on that. And there’s a lot of ideas out there on how to do that and a lot of technique already there.

One thing I didn’t hear that I thought I might is what role will technology and digital play in professional development and local preparation for this. I heard a lot about good websites, instructional units; they are out there, but it seems to me that we have just a lot of different materials and units and lessons floating around, resources. We heard about the Basal Alignment, idea of aligning the basal texts, but I guess my question is, with all of that, how can that help teachers enough and in enough depth to implement Common Core? And that, I think, remains to me still hazy. In the halcyon days of old, 2000, we had a lot of money for professional development. I remember go back to class with Bill Honig. We had a lot of resources to run professional development, a lot of institutes. The districts, although hardly flush in money, also had a lot of resources at that time. So I think that the issue remains of how to deliver all this professional development and professional capacity building and can we—I doubt we can do it in sessions with people, flying them around. The county

offices can help, WestEd can help, others can help. But if— is there a role for the digital revolution, if you will, in actually delivering this?

I looked several years ago—I haven't looked at it recently—at corporate training and corporate training on the web. And it was so sophisticated what they were doing. These were for corporation mid-level executives and various corporation practitioners. And so we're left with units and websites and all of that sort of thing. So I'm still thinking that we need to work through how to scale up the professional development effort. Within that we need more resources. And I took away one big idea for state policy, which I discussed with some of the participants here, that I will explore and have my staff working on now, which is the State Board is a state education agency for California, unlike lot of states, and we have quite a bit of influence over Title I. So what I'm looking at for my own job is to see how we can better align Title I with the implementation of Common Core. Sandy and I were at dinner last night; she mentioned Title II and then said she also used Title I; other people used EIA.

So we have Title I with a whole structure of planning and program improvement built on a 2001 law called No Child Left Behind and a concept called program improvement, which is, with the waiver process at the federal level, largely dying across the country in terms of the focus. So the question becomes how could we—what could the state do to say we want you to use Title I more for implementation of Common Core. We're going to rewrite our regulations and stimuli and whatever we do to encourage that; we're going to rethink program improvement and the guiding principles that underline that. And then we would ask you to rewrite your local education plans; most of those plans were 2002, 2003, and 2004. That's a long time ago. And we would then try and mobilize some technical assistance, perhaps from our friends at WestEd and other organizations to help do that.

So anyway, that would—so my idea is to sort of take Title I and program improvement and move that ship around to be closely, more closely aligned to the implementation of Common Core. This is deep in my interest. I was the second person hired in the Title I office in 1965 in the U.S. Office of Education. I was there when we shoveled a billion dollars out the door in three months and god knows what, they said, how many are we're serving. I remember this, and they've used this number as a base ever since. And another guy and I sat around for ten minutes and came up with an estimate and that was—that's been used as the per-pupil cost for the years of what we started with. So I got a lot of stories. So I've retained my interest in this Title I area. So at least, I think we can think about some creative things to get more resources to you.

A theme that came up to me, which the academics call, that you're using, is “distributed leadership.” What's so different about this discussion in recent years in school districts from before is how much professional learning

communities are important and how much leadership within your own teachers and teacher collaboration levels below assistant superintendents. All of that is something that I heard a lot about, and that, I think, is something that we could talk about in a more systematic way. It will vary across districts and schools, but you're certainly doing that and I certainly learned a lot about how you're doing distributed and decentralized leadership in the school way. These, as everybody said, these professional learning communities need something to focus on; otherwise it's just talk. And so obviously the Common Core is one of those.

When Bill Honig spoke, I think he outlined some things in the future. And to reinforce that, I think we didn't convey or he didn't have enough time to convey, nor do we clearly have a grasp of it, but we are moving away from the idea of "textbooks," as you have known them and "adoption," as you have known them. You know, that's like the Oldsmobile. And so it was interesting and worked on seven-year cycles and you had five books and so on. And all of that appears pretty quaint at this point from our vantage point. So basically we're negotiating—we do not have authority at the State Board level to do anything with materials; the legislature passed a moratorium on that. And we are negotiating this month with assemblywoman Brownlee and the Senate a new authority for the State Board on instructional materials. So I cannot be definitive on that because it's in negotiation, but Brownlee's original bill came with a new vision, and so we're in the same orbit here. And generally what I think we're going to do is set out explicit criteria for materials and then adopt anything that meets that. So if it's something from New York, fine; if it's something you nominate up from the bottom that is not a national distribution network of some company or something, then we would also be able to approve that if it met the criteria that we're setting up. So we see a more open and flexible process in the future.

And the other thing I heard here was, and laying into that, is it seems to be a diminished role then for the traditional large textbook producers. People talked here at this meeting about free materials; quite a bit of what was talked about out here it is no charge. I don't remember that in, let's say, 2000, when we did this before, that was all as free stuff on the Internet that you could go out and get. And so there's some new balance arising here in terms of materials of flexible state adoption under Common Core criteria and then mixtures of free and then more expensive materials and I—it's something I ruminated about during the meeting. And I think it's an important development and one that you want to pay attention to and we ought to work with in the future.

I came to the meeting with the most questions and the most—the least knowledge about English learners. I've been around the issue on the Board before. We had a strict bilingual policy. If you had—this is when I was on the

Board from '75 to '82, some of the old timers will remember this—I think if you had ten or more in your classroom, we had a whole bunch of regulations, and it said what you had to do to offer a “bilingual program.” So I knew a lot about that, but that’s not very useful now either, so we’ve had an initiative and everything else. So I think this is, in some ways, the most daunting area for content, and it will affect now all of the content and self-contained teachers. So all of a sudden teachers will have more responsibility directly in their classrooms for merged groups of pupils, and they’ll probably be less separate, you know, ELD teachers and ELD. So that area I wanted to learn more about. Kenji was very clear on the discourse and complexity issues that, that this arose. And so I went to the breakout session by George Bunch and learned quite a bit about how to handle one lesson and one concept to be worked intensively with the Gettysburg Address there and other areas and he had a more fine-grained presentation on that. So I thought that was very useful. but it’s still an area that is really under development. What we saw was really a unit that’s still being field-tested in that regard. produced largely by a team at—or solely by WestEd with Aida Walqui in the lead of it.

So the buzzword, the new buzzword in English learners, I hear is this *scaffolding*, and it still remains vague to me. My father in Reading, Pennsylvania, ran a painting and paper-hanging company where I grew up. And I worked for the company, and I used to get on scaffolds to paint, so I know about scaffolds in that regard but I don’t really—I’m still vague on how scaffolding would work, and I’m sure that it, it seems to me it’s a concept under development. So is another one called *learning progressions*. As I go around, that term is very elastic; it’s used by different people for different meanings. And I go to some meetings where learning progressions are really micro bits of learning, and then this meeting learning progression was in much bigger chunks. So I’m still vague on scaffolding and learning progressions, but I’ll learn and I’m trying to do that.

One of my questions in the EL meeting, which was the same as I saw in the English learner, I’m sorry, the English language arts one from Washoe County, Reno, area, is how are we fitting together standards, units, and lesson plans? So floating around—and all these things that are on websites, that are bits and pieces. So I have this vision of all these bits and pieces being produced, and you go to this groovy website, you get a unit or something, and now we’re producing with WestEd at the state level. Modules. There’s yet another word. So we have modules, units, lesson plans, standards. So as a standards guy, which is my state role, how do all of these fit in the standards and who will make that clear? Because right now I see your world as really sort of broken up in pieces, and I’m not sure how they’re all assembled and how they will be assembled in the future, and so that will really in that regard. The big thing to watch, I think, from the standpoint of state policy is the biggest thing in our agenda in September, is the English language development standards. And

we're moving towards an era of putting the Common Core and the ELD standards in a closer relationship, but that will still effect how they will really be integrated. And will people teach mostly the content standards and very little ELD? How will the ELD standards influence things? How do the teachers that haven't had a lot of ELD students use those? I think that's an issue that's very well in that regard.

Finally, I attended some of the meetings of the groups that were at the working level, working clusters, I guess, and I ended up more with the—I think, they would be mostly assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction and that level. And one of the fascinating comments was “We need to retrain particularly the secondary students as well as the teachers.” The students have learned to work in mathematics quietly and alone. And they've been trained that way, and all of a sudden we're going to have this collaborative group, a lot of noise in the mathematics classroom, and they're not oriented that way either. And so some people were saying we are going to have a harder lift with the students than we may have with the teachers. I thought that was interesting; I had never thought about that. And then also these people were very attentive to the need—the impact of Common Core on teacher and principal evaluation. It changes a lot what you “need to look for” in engagement of students and achievement and all that sort of thing. So and then I reflect on this shrill national teacher evaluation debate we're having, and I'm not sure it's incorporating this sophistication of here we have Common Core coming and you're going to have to look for different things when you evaluate teachers perhaps than you have in the past, and where are the people working on the protocols for that. And I'm sure there are people but that's another piece of this thing that has to come together.

Finally, let me talk a little bit about some pieces of assessment in regard to thinking about assessment and the job—Deb Sigman mentioned the AB 250 assessment plan, which we must submit from the Board and the superintendent to the legislature in November 2012. But just to give you an idea of this task, if you—okay, imagine a grid that has the four subject matters at the top: English language arts, math, science, history/social science. That's up there. And now your grades are on this side Pre-K through 12. Okay, now what will Smarter Balanced actually deliver? I'm leading up to how many holes in the cells there are. They will give me in this entire grid—give us as a state—grades three through eight English language arts and math and grade 11 English arts language and math. I have got blanks in every other box, all the secondary schools, secondary programs that we're now, we have CST end-of-course exams for; they are all still there and they were not designed to be aligned with this Common Core. I've got nothing in cells for ninth and tenth grade at all. I've got nothing in the second grade, which has been an area that California has had a big debate about testing. So I've got all these holes in this plan. And Smarter Balanced, it's hardly—you know, bless their hearts—but they

have a contract to deliver certain things and they're not going to deliver all these cells that I have that are open and need to fill in, in this plan.

So we've been talking a whole lot about what we used to do, which is matrix sampling of all types. That if the school is the unit of accountability, then we will go back to the old California assessments that were there in the 70s and then class system. Not perhaps in English language arts and mathematics, but in these hole areas, at least we will use for some of them and some points matrix samples for the school level. So you don't have to test every kid in every subject. We need to break out of that like we need to break out of the idea of the old-fashioned adoption. So you can get a school score without testing all kids, and we did it in the past. You can hybrid matrix sampling, where you give all kids some questions and matrix sample others. And then for some subjects, it would appear to me that we should think about just making a performance assessment the whole thing. We could have a science exam—I'm making this up—for grade 10 in a science subject that was a performance exam; that's it for that area. So there's a lot of concepts floating around there, and at some point we're going to have to come back and, as this conference mentioned frequently, when we finally get more clarity on the assessment, we're going to have to have another talk about how that ought to be designed and laid out.

As Deb Sigman made clear, our friends in the legislature must pass a law to reauthorize the assessment program, so this is something we cannot do through the general powers. And it was interesting in working in this group around the state that what I heard from, say, history and social science and science teachers was, well, we need to cut down on testing, yes; but if you don't test it, they won't teach it. And so we want to test, they kept saying, because if they don't test history, we won't teach history or they won't teach it intensively or what. So you need to know that's out there. So we were really charged with filling in all these boxes and getting them covered. And I think you'll want to look at that pretty carefully and see what you make of that in terms of what the group came up with. It's a commission specified by the legislature; the members who were primarily teachers. And I nominated myself to be the Board member, so I sat through all of it and was enlightened by it, and it's very interesting. So I just wanted to broaden the discussion on assessment from just Smarter Balanced. We've got a lot more action coming than just whatever they are contracted in to do.

So those are some thoughts and, as I said, remarks. So this is what I found remarkable. And I thank you for your attention and for staying so long. And I look forward to seeing you again and working with you over time. And you know how to reach me, and I'll see you again. Thank you.