

Center for American Progress



SPECIAL PRESENTATION

“NATIONALIZE THE SCHOOLS (...A LITTLE)!”

MODERATED BY:

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MS. CYNTHIA BROWN: My name is Cindy Brown and I'm the director of education policy here at the Center for American Progress, and we are very pleased that you've joined us today for what we expect to be a very lively conversation. We also know there are actually a bunch more people we expect to join us. But we thought we ought to get started in fairness to you.

We're going to tackle today a subject that has been politically taboo virtually everywhere in this country, a critical examination of local control of schools. In his provocative and enlightening paper, Center Senior Fellow Matt Miller gives us a U.S. history lesson on local control, and provides a tough analysis about why it no longer serves us well. As my schoolteacher mother would have said, he gores a lot of oxen along the way and I'm sure he will give us a taste of that this morning.

Our commentators today are likely to present the pros and cons of Matt's proposals for a new national role in standards and finance, the "a little" of nationalization of schools that he calls for.

Before introducing our speakers and letting them present their analyses and positions, I wanted to note that the education taskforce of the Center for American Progress made very complimentary recommendations in its August 2005 report, *Getting Smarter, Becoming Fairer: A Progressive Education Agenda for a Stronger Nation*. The taskforce, co-chaired by Governor Napolitano of Arizona, made the case for, and recommended that the federal government support the crafting, adoption, and promotion of voluntary rigorous national curriculum standards in core subject areas.

It also recommended strong accountability measures and the initiation of a national conversation about not only the importance of standards and accountability, but also the need for paying sufficiently and equitably for public schooling. Slowly but surely, these issues have gained more public visibility. We'll have to see if visibility turns into momentum for change and real action.

Hopefully, today's event will provide another push in that direction. So let's get to it. I'm going to give a short introduction of each speaker. They will make their remarks, then we are going to engage in some back-and-forth discussion, and after that, we will open the floor to audience questions and answers.

Matt Miller is a senior fellow here at the Center for American Progress. He's also a columnist for *Fortune* magazine and the host of "Left, Right, and Center," a political week-in-review program aired on public radio stations across the country. He is also the author of *The Two Percent Solution: Fixing America's Problems in Ways Liberals and Conservatives Can Love*, which was published in 2003.

Commenting on Matt's paper are Roy Romer and Reginald Felton.

Roy Romer is chairman of Strong American Schools, better known as ED in '08. He was formerly superintendent of schools in Los Angeles, California, and governor of Colorado for three terms. He served as chair of the Education Commission of the States and the National Education Goals Panel.

Reggie Felton is director of federal relations at the National School Boards Association, where he represents the interests of local school boards on Capitol Hill and with the administration. Prior to coming to NSBA, he was a senior executive at the Department of Navy. He also was an elected member of the Montgomery County, Maryland, Board of Education for 10 years, from 1994-2004, three of those years as the president.

So as you can see, we have a wonderful panel of quite diverse experiences and perspectives on this issue of local control. So now, I turn the floor over to Matt.

MR. MATT MILLER: Thanks very much, Cynthia. Thanks to all of you for being here this morning. I'm glad we can provide at least an hour and a half distraction before everybody starts the nail biting and Blackberry and internet checking on Texas and Ohio later today. And I hope it's a good chance to think a little bit about an issue that all of us say is central to our future and our children's future, because it's all about the kids, as we hear in every campaign, but which has actually gotten surprisingly little discussion in the presidential campaign today, which is education.

I watch, as an education fetishist, to see how often this comes up in the debates that we've seen, and it's very rare, and almost never do you see any candidate forced to go beyond a handful of talking points. And there's almost no scrutiny, no depth, and no substance of issues that all of us, I think, know in our heart are going to drive future living standards and the fate of our economy and our democracy. So perhaps there's a way, that in some small way, we can nudge that conversation forward in hopes that as we turn to the general election, there'll be a chance to join this debate in a more public and more robust way.

Now, one of the reasons we often hear for the absence of this debate at the presidential level is that schools are basically a local issue. This is not something that's a national or federal issue. And my argument is that this uniquely American obsession with the idea that schools are a local matter is obsolete. It's an antiquated idea that may have made perfect sense in the 1700s and 1800s, when the foundations of American education were getting started, but that today, it's actually behind some of the biggest problems, and least discussed problems, we face across American schools.

It may have worked for a long time. Obviously, we rose to become a superpower with a system of local control of education, so we can't say that we weren't doing something right or a lot right, but I think that as we look ahead and we look at the current situation today, it leaves us with problems that, as Cindy said, are almost taboo in public debate for reasons I'm sure we'll get into as we move ahead.

Just one thought, though, just to frame this. Since 1983, it's now been a quarter century since *A Nation at Risk* raised the alarm about the rising tide of mediocrity in American schools. And since that time, we've basically had 15,000 local school districts in charge of America's strategy and response, if you can call it that. There's been some more help from the states recently, even a newer, very modest, but newer federal role in more recent years, but the end result of that has been not so different, than if FDR had said, after Pearl Harbor, "Why don't we let thousands of local ammunitions factories and armaments makers decide what we need to do to gear up for World War II? They know what to do at the local level," right? I think the results have been essentially predictable.

Despite some important pockets of improvement, America's still nowhere close to raising all students to the standard of the treatment that we need in this coming era, when thanks to the global economy, and the good news for rising countries like China and India, who are bringing hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, our kids are not anywhere near the levels of achievement they need to be able to compete in the world that they're going to be entering in the years ahead.

And the bottom line is we're spending as much or more than all the other advanced wealthy nations on education, and we score in the middle to the bottom of the pack on all the international comparisons that educators respect. So I'd submit that something is wrong with performance, when we're in that situation.

What's more, I believe it's essentially inevitable that over the next decade, as we come to fully appreciate the threat that these rising economies pose to the future living standards of Americans, that we're going to reach a more robust national consensus about the need to nationalize our schools a little. Let me be clear about what I mean in using that provocative phrase.

I think we need to find a consensus on a national role in two big areas. One is the standards to which we say that all kids are going to learn, so that there's not some vast difference between what you're expected to know if you're born in Boston or in Birmingham. And then we're going to reach a consensus on a bigger national role in school finance to address the huge and unjust inequity between districts and between states, between the rich and poor in this country, which is leaving millions and millions of poor children without the resources they need to be able to make progress.

I think that the result of this, paradoxically, is not some federal takeover, is not some set of bureaucrats in Washington who are going to be telling you in local school districts what to do, but in fact, if we do this right, the way some other countries have done, it will actually create real autonomy for local schools in ways that if you talk to principals and teachers, they don't feel today.

They feel hidebound by red tape, by checking boxes with local and state and school board and federal mandates and regulations that govern the entire day and everything that teachers and principals and students do. And instead, if we have a clear

set of standards, the resources to achieve them, and set communities free, with local schools and local parents to do this, it'll create the kind of autonomy that lets us have the diversity of schools that makes sense in a pluralistic society like the U.S., but also reaching the kind of standards that we know kids will need in this century to thrive.

So to give you a kind of lightening overview of the arguments that I develop in more detail in the paper, let me do three things now quickly. One is just to share a little history. The second is to call out the problems created by traditional local control that almost never get discussed in our political debate. And then third, I will just briefly suggest the direction that we need to follow in our reforms..

Now, when it comes to the history, what I found interesting when I went to look back at how we ended up with the system that we had, and why it is different than that of so many other wealthy nations, I was fascinated that Horace Mann, whom I knew little about, except for the fact that he was an education icon, or the father of public education, when I started this research. He actually took a trip in 1843 to Prussia. He was then six years into his service as the Massachusetts Education Secretary or the equivalent then. That post is what earned him lasting fame as the father of public education. He got his name on lots of schools.

But at the time, Prussia was all the rage among education reformers because of the results they were getting, and there was sort of a buzz on both sides of the Atlantic about what they were doing. So Horace Mann, who had been newly remarried, decided to combine a honeymoon with some European fact-finding and went from Boston to England first, where he did some touring, and then went to Prussia, where what he found actually stunned him. He found that in the U.S. system, even with his important role in Massachusetts, he had very little formal authority despite his state position. He had almost no budget resources and no formal authority, except the bully pulpit to try and coach these wildly different districts under his purview into doing anything.

In Prussia, they had a much more centralized system. There were national institutes for teacher training that took as much care in teacher training as the Prussians did, for example, in training military officers,. They had essentially the contemporary equivalent of a kind of national standard in testing. And the teacher corps had a quality that Mann and his wife were just absolutely amazed by. And he took from this observation of foreign lands – and one of the things I wanted to point out for contemporary educators and reformers, is that Horace Mann, who's sort of the hero of American education, had the self-confidence and the comfort to look abroad for ideas, and to see what he thought was something that we needed to do. It was kind of his Sputnik moment when he went to Prussia.

He was never able to, nor did he want to, enact a full Prussian system, as the object of the Prussian system, remember, was to create obedient subjects for the emperor, and that obviously wasn't going to be something that transplanted well to American soil. He thought, however, that there were lessons from this experience that were undeniable, and he tried to implement these over the years ahead. He made lots of progress in terms

of having a state role to assure that the common school, as public schools were called, became taxpayer funded, that teacher training was done in some way that the state supported, and his whole thrust, the lesson from experience, was that he took a higher level of authority than the mere locality to actually do right by kids and to give every kid, no matter his background, a solid educational foundation. There were some communities in Massachusetts at the time who were doing a terrific job with schooling in its nascent stage. And there were lots of communities that were totally falling down on the job.

And the accident of birth, then as it does now, has a lot to do with what kind of education you get. Mann thought it was important for a higher level of authority to actually play a role in undoing the randomness and arbitrariness on which a child's fate would rest if it were just left to the locality.

Now, you flash forward to today, and I think the problems that local control faces, which don't get discussed, are basically fourfold. The first is tremendous financial inequity between wealthier districts and poor districts in the United States, a topic that almost never gets discussion at the national level. The fact is that 91 percent of the cost of education is paid for by the local level. The federal government only covers 9 percent of K-12 education costs, while local property taxes still account for about 45 percent in the states now. These are still local and based on area wealth, a discrepancy which accounts for another 45 percent.

But the difference between wealthy districts and poor districts can top, and routinely tops, \$5,000 per pupil. In many cases, it tops \$10,000 per pupil. We happen to sit in one city, by the way, that's an outlier on this. So I'm sure we'll hear in the question and answer period that Washington, DC, puts more at the top and that we get less out of the bottom. How can that mean that money matters for education? Washington's an outlier. So is Newark, New Jersey, but by and large, poor areas, because of the local basis of school finance, have less money for the kids who, in my view, actually need this the most.

Even in foreign countries, and we can talk about this in the Q&A time, but foreign countries that conservatives in the U.S. point to, like the Netherlands and Sweden, who've adopted more universal systems of choice, which the Right likes, take as a given that every school is going to have, and every pupil is going to have, the same amount of dollars following him. That's something the Right tends not to talk about in these debates. And in the Netherlands, they actually increased the amount for people who are most in need, for kids who come from less advantaged backgrounds, because they rightly argue that it takes more money to help those kids get to the same levels of achievement as middle class and upper middle class and wealthier kids who come with so many advantages.

So financial inequality is pervasive throughout America - this is the first big problem with local control. And what it means is that, as a country, we systematically assign the least qualified teachers and the most rundown facilities to the students who need great schools the most. I would argue that nothing could be more unjust than that.

The second big problem of local control is that we have wildly inconsistent standards and no way to tell, as a country, how we're doing at a time when our focus on international competitiveness needs to be more serious than ever. Even *No Child Left Behind*, which some people think made strides in that regard, as many of you know, left the choice of the definition of standards and proficiency to the 50 states. And as a lot of reports have pointed out, like an excellent one by the Thomas Fordham Foundation a few months ago, that this has led to, in many cases, a race to the bottom, where the political impulse is to define a lot of the standards low, so you can create the illusion of progress.

And in any case, you've got wildly different expectations, depending on where kids happen to be born, as to what they're supposed to learn. If you consider Massachusetts, which is still a leader in education, their standards for fourth or fifth grade reading include dealing with a passage from Tolstoy. If you look at some other states across the nation, they have to cope with things like "See Jane Run." That's the disparity in what we're expecting students to reach. It makes it impossible, at least when I talk to educators around the country, for anyone to get a handle on where we really stand as a nation and what we ought to do. So that disparity in standards and the inadequate data is the second major flaw that local control essentially dooms us to.

The third one, which doesn't get much attention either, is that there's very little research and development in education. So you've got an entire sector, in which we spend about \$450 billion or \$500 billion a year in K-12. Any other sector of that size in the U.S. economy generally has enormous amounts of R&D driving innovation and the techniques and approaches that it takes to succeed. And yet, as we know, the classroom, the basic classroom practice of having 25 or 30 kids plus the teacher standing up front, hasn't changed much in decades and decades. One of the reasons is that because we're so decentralized and we've got so many local decision makers, that it really discourages the private sector from actually innovating in ways that might help us make progress.

Ask anyone who runs businesses – if you've got to try to sell in to school districts, when there are 15,000 of them, when there's a very cumbersome decision-making process and all of them are so small, there's nowhere to go to have a conversation about why we can't come up with ways to use technology to devise tailored learning strategies for kids with different learning styles. This is the kind of stuff that ought to be going on.

Today, at the federal level, that stuff doesn't happen because the local control advocate would say, "Wait a minute. We don't want the federal government doing that." And the private sector doesn't do it because of the complexity and fragmentation of education as a market. So the lack of R&D is a third big problem.

The fourth big problem, caused by local control – and I know this is sensitive, especially on the Democratic Party side, but I think local control leaves us with undue union dominance of local districts, especially in the biggest districts, in the biggest cities, that serve millions and millions and millions of low income kids. And I don't begrudge the unions for pursuing their self-interest, but I think any fair-minded observer who looks

at the way major urban school districts are run, would have to say that these districts are run more in the interest of the adults who are involved with the system than in the interest of students.

It's what political scientists would say is a classic case of interest group capture, and that the adults who are running the system end up in fights and in negotiations over dividing up the pie and in doing things that serve their interests more so than focusing on what it would take to improve student learning for the kids. I'm sure we can have a healthy debate over that, but in my view, that's one of the problems that local control has bequeathed us.

So with those as the problems, let me just sketch just briefly the direction I think we need to go in and we can talk more about it in the discussion period.

First, I think we need to move toward national standards. Now, this has always been a toxic phrase - the classic cliché is that the problem with national standards is that the Right hates national and the Left hates standards, but I think that's changing. You'll see people like Bill Bennett or Rod Paige, Republican secretaries of education, writing in the *Washington Post* in the last couple of years, saying that we're kidding ourselves if we think that this fragmented system we have is going to get us where we need to be in the era of global competition, and that we're going to need to move toward some kind of national system. You have folks on the Left or center-left, even like our own Center for American Progress, which itself, has moved the conversation that way as well.

So polls, by the way, including some done by the organization that Roy's been involved with, *Strong American Schools*, as well as the more conservative leading magazine *Education Next*, have all shown support for the common-sense idea that there ought to be American standards. You shouldn't be learning something - you shouldn't be expected to know a different set of things in core subjects like reading or math or science, depending on what state or village you happen to grow up in. So I think people are ahead of where the politicians are in this regard, and we know there are many political sensitivities about this that we can discuss, but we need to move that way. And I think Roy and others will have pragmatic ideas about what the right next steps are.

Second, I think we must increase the federal role in school finance. It is not written anywhere in the Constitution that the federal government can contribute only 9 percent of K-12 spending. And if we are ever going to address the deep financial injustice facing education in America, it will not happen unless the federal government contributes more.

My argument is that we should move to the federal government spending 25 to 30 percent or so of national spending, and that that would create a huge ability to redress some of the problems that we now have in ways that I detail in the paper, and highlight different options that we might take, if we put that new pot of money on the table from the feds. What's interesting is that this idea is not new. Nothing is really new, but what

is interesting is the last official to look seriously at this question was none other than Richard Nixon, whom I tend to think of as our last liberal president.

Nixon had a commission on school finance, headed by the then chairman of Procter & Gamble in 1972 who proposed an idea to have the states equalize their school funding between districts by lifting the bottom. We're never talking about trying to bring the top down because that would never work politically, and it's not fair to communities who want to spend more, but there's got to be a way to lift up the bottom through these different supports. And at the time, Nixon's commission said there should be a pot of money put on the table from the feds to help do that, an idea that Nixon's White House considered. This was Erlichman's domestic policy shot, but it didn't work because it was leaked to the *New York Times*. If you go back and look at the coverage at the time, it was what they were calling then, or what was going to be Nixon's education master stroke.

Now, it was never proposed, but the idea was to have a value-added tax at the federal level that would be swapped out and used as a supplement to the property tax for states that would use that money from the federal level to raise and equalize, by lifting the bottom, the gross inequities that have persisted in American education for 200 years now. So something fresh like that, a revenue source that could be used to incentivize the states and localities to lift the bottom is the kind of thinking we're going to need, and it can't happen without a bigger federal role in school finance.

Lastly and briefly, I think the fed should boost research and development from where it is now, a situation where you've got \$28 billion being spent by the National Institutes of Health on research, and you've got 1/100th of that being devoted to what the education world now calls R&D at the federal level. Taking that to something like 4 billion could begin to make a difference.

And then finally, I think we need to have – and it'll be only the federal government that can require it - our students have some kind of cosmopolitan outlook as they head into this new global age, whether that means requirements for studying a second language or some kind of course requirements that require exposure to this incredibly diverse world that our kids are going to grow up in and have to thrive in and will inherit. It shouldn't be up to the whim of any local school board whether kids are growing up and have the exposure to and some acquaintance with world religions, world languages, and world cultures, as it is today.

So in closing, I think that in essence, what anyone who cares about American education today needs to do, like Horace Mann did, is to make a kind of mental trip to Prussia and think about what can we learn from other systems, many of which have done this kind of stuff and have done it for a long time and are getting better results with less money than we're devoting to this issue today.

And the reason I think we're close to a tipping point on this is because of the threat we're going to be facing as our economy faces new challenges from rising economies. If you had asked in 1928 – if you had asked most people whether the federal

government had a role in providing retirement security for ordinary Americans, most people would have said that's crazy. In 1938, it would have seemed like common sense. I think when we look back in 2018 or so, the idea that the federal government wasn't playing a bigger role, especially in the standard that all kids need to learn, as well as in federal financing, to assure some basic levels of equity and justice, we'll have that same feeling.

Thank you.

MS. BROWN: Thanks Matt for a great start. Roy?

MR. ROY ROMER: My discipline is 10 minutes. I have a colleague to help me here with that. Thank you, Matt, for doing another job of opening our minds. This is an issue that raises all kinds of questions. I have an interesting catbird seat to comment on. I was governor for 12 years. I was superintendent of schools for six and a half, and I chaired the original National Goals Panel.

Let me aim – let me try to give you my view. My view is Matt's on the right track. I think that there is a value in school boards and I want to get to that, but we have got to modify the current policy. I believe that in standards, there's a place to start. And I want to very quickly to tell you what I think is possible politically. Let me invite you to the White House the week after the next election, November of '09, whoever that president is. I would hope, after he – he or she - has the first week of discussion with the staff about the critical four problems that they face in this world, the war or national security, the economy, health, global warming, and some others.

The second week, that newly elected president will call in 50 governors and 50 states' school officers and say, "I cannot address any one of those four policy issues over a long period of time without increasing the effective capacity of this nation in its skills and knowledge. Education is the key to moving on any one of those other areas. Therefore, I've got to make a deal with you right now and the deal I offer is the following. First, we've got to arrive at higher expectations for every student in America, but I don't want the federal government to legislate it to you. I want 15 of you to agree on what those standards will be.

I want you to benchmark them against the 10 best nations in the world annually, and I want you to benchmark them against the standards that your college has used not to admit students, but to assign students to class. If 15 of you do that, here's what I will do. I will waive your requirements on *No Child Left Behind* and give you a different time table. I will pay for the design of your tests because the tests, or the quality of those tests, are key to this whole system, and I will pay for the administration of those tests.

In other words, you are going to decide how good is good enough. You're going to annually benchmark them. The federal government's not going to tell you what you need to do. You're going to decide for my eighth grader to have a life, to be able to

compete in this world, they have got to be able to compete against the best in the world. Therefore, you will arrive at the standard. I will help you get there.”

That is the political paradigm that will work. And that candidate will say that elected president will say, “I learned this in Iowa. I can’t go to Iowa and say, ‘I know better and I’m going to have the federal government to tell you how to run your schools’. But I can go to Iowa and say, ‘I’m here to guarantee you that your eighth grader will be prepared for life and prepared educationally for the world that she’s going to live in, and here’s how we’re going to do it together. You’re going to arrive at the standard. You’re going to benchmark it annually. I’m going to help you get there.’”

That then sets the stage for the next move, which is how do you get there financially and other things. But we’ve got to get a different paradigm going here. I believe that this has to happen this way. There’s such efficiency in having an 11th grade algebra II test done by 15 states together, than in one state alone. And I just believe that there is a fall-out in the way we use technology and textbooks and everything from a more uniform, rigorous national curriculum. That’s one comment.

Secondly, let me talk about school boards. I lived in a town of 800. The school board is a very, very important part of that town. You always are going to have an organization that relates to that school, but I also served as superintendent in Los Angeles, in which – I can’t remember now how many millions of constituents we had - but there were a lot. And we had an election of the school board, which is dominated by who can raise the most money, and the unions raised the most money. And therefore, I had a school board in which when I’m negotiating a teacher’s contract, I had the teachers on both sides of the table, *both* sides of the table. They’re negotiating and they have elected the board that they were negotiating with. That’s not a healthy condition. It’s just not healthy.

Now, therefore, one comment very quickly is that in very large areas, we need to really look at how elections are run, how they’re financed, what controls them, and we need to revise the way in which we elect and choose school boards in some circumstances.

Now, beyond that, the next point, I want to move to Matt’s paper because I agree with him that we need to move toward a more uniform American set of standards. I agree with him that we need to move to a greater federal participation in financing. I agree with him on the research and development. We would need a national institute of education, similar to how we have a National Institute of Health, in order to help us make these changes.

But there is one piece of his paper that I want to raise an issue about, and that is the one that talks about the genuine economy for local schools. You remember his four points, that he wants to get to a genuine economy for local schools. And the way you can do that is have a more clear national policy in the area of standards, and it then would concomitantly give schools greater freedom.

In LA, I had to face this issue constantly. What is the value of the district? And if you have a district that happens to be large, some 100,000 students, you just can't rely on the talent of one individual school to pull itself up by its bootstraps. You had to give it assistance as a district and that can be worked out. But the autonomy of a local school is really a valuable thing if you have teachers and a principal that are there who say, "We've got room to do what we need to do, but here are the guidelines and here's the accountability we need to do it." That is a good mechanism. The district has a role in that when it's in such large place as California.

Let me then summarize. This is a very powerful idea. We can't get to where we're going by our decentralization of education. As I have looked at the major industrial nations of the world, they have a national education policy that is closely caught into their national economic policy. And we -- if we come out of this election, no matter who is the winner -- we inevitably are going to be focused on the economic conditions of this country.

Anyone who looks carefully at what we can do to make this country work economically would argue that we've got to improve the educational system. All economies of the future are going to be based upon skills and knowledge. And we simply have got an ancient system and an ancient machine to produce high quality. And the worst thing is that we are asleep about it. We really don't understand.

Time and time again, I go to states and again, I'll use Iowa. They think we're pretty good. I'll ask, "How are you doing with your students?" Well, 65 percent are proficient in the eighth grade. I look at -- (unintelligible) -- 35 percent are proficient in the eighth grade. I look at them compared to Singapore, 25 percent of them are efficient. We just simply, and this is my summary statement, need to come back to the American people and say, "Let's look at your deepest set of values. And they're represented probably in the way you value your children, and what do you hope for those children? And if you look at the world they're in, the kind of skill sets they need to have, and the knowledge that is going to be required of them, you see that these things are simply not being provided. You need to know that."

We need to help them get that evidence. Then we need to give them a mechanism where they can move from where they are to where they want to be. They will be with us. They just simply want to have a system that will produce the kind of future for their children and their family that they hope for themselves.

Those are my comments.

MS. BROWN: Terrific. Reggie?

MR. REGINALD FELTON: Good morning. In reviewing Matt's paper, I'm reminded of the title of a movie starring Clint Eastwood back in the 1960s, and as I look over the audience, most of you weren't around -- (laughter) -- but the title of that movie

was *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. “Good” in that Matt calls for significantly increased federal resources to support our public schools. Local school boards across the nation continue to receive new mandates from the federal government and continue to be shortchanged in terms of federal funding.

One clear example is the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, where Congress promised 40 percent, and here we are 30 years later, and Congress has only contributed 20 percent. Or we could point to the federal government’s commitment to help states ensure quality educational programs for students in poverty, and yet today, the federal funding supports less than 50 percent of those students eligible. Or we could point to increasing federal requirements to improve the academic achievement of English language learners, yet even as we review next year’s budgets, the federal government fails to provide the funding necessary to ensure that we have valid and reliable assessments for ELL students.

We could cite other examples, but the point remains that if the federal government is committed to improving our competitiveness in the global market, the federal government cannot ignore the need for increased federal investment in education. And so if we are to improve our national ranking, we must have increased federal investment. So that’s the good.

Now, the bad, in our view, is the proposal for national standards, not because we’re opposed to more rigorous standards, or that we do not fully recognize the potential for higher caliber standards, or greater stability in educating students in a highly mobile society; rather, we believe it’s bad because the argument has not been laid out in a comprehensive manner that not only acknowledges the potential benefits, but also acknowledges and addresses the reality that the reluctance for increased federal control of operations from Washington is based more on the very little financial support the federal government currently provides, which, on our estimations, is around 7 percent.

States and local communities believe that if the federal government really wants to control local operations, they need to make a much larger investment, and besides, with states and local school districts providing 93 percent of the cost of educating our students, then what has happened is that they’ve developed their own views on what students should know and be able to do in specific subjects, as well as the performance levels that students should have.

Think of – I can’t say your children coming home, but as I look at the audience, let’s say you go back home with your parents, and you now want to tell them how they should operate their household because you happened to give them \$200 a month. That would not cut it.

Other education stakeholders at the state and local levels are concerned that national standards would lead to national assessments that would certainly promote, if not mandate, national curricula and instruction. Their concerns are as to whether such standards should be voluntary or mandated, whether there should be targeted subjects for

all, whether there should be exclusive funding by the federal government, or whether there should be matching funding.

So bad, not because the concept is worthy of discussion, but in this case, bad because the full complexity of the issue has not been articulated. While some may support national standards conceptually, and others may support some voluntary approach, the need exists for very serious discussions to be held with major stakeholders, so that the federal, state and local governments fully understand both the implications and the implementation challenges.

More importantly, what must be clarified is that standards and school boards are not mutually exclusive. Let me say that again. Standards and school boards are not mutually exclusive. The merit of national standards, or any other proposals for education reform, must be argued independently. Therefore, questions on any reform must be framed around its value and benefits in advancing the quality of public education for all students, and accompanied by a comprehensive and realistic plan to ensure successful achievement.

If Matt believes that adopting national standards is in the best interest of all students, then we would expect him to accompany that proposal with at least some discussion regarding both a comprehensive strategy for achieving positive public support, as well as the identification of workable options to achieve the desired results.

And finally, the ugly. I don't think there's going to be any surprise to any of you that we would view the total elimination of school boards as ugly. Matt's paper, on first glance, seems to have some merit, but very quickly begins to sound like the beginnings of a movement to federalize public education programs across the nation. More importantly, rather than to share his views on why exclusive federal control of standards, as part one, would be more effective, efficient, and consistent with the will of the people it serves, he calls for the elimination of local control. As I stated earlier, standards and school boards are not mutually exclusive.

As we know, most Americans place a high value on the basic principles on which our democratic society is based - of the people, by the people, and for the people. Yet, when it comes to local governments or public education, Matt believes that this should not apply. One must ask if he believes that other public services would also be better if those services were federalized. Certainly, Matt and other citizens in this country have the right to question the capability and performance of their local public school board members, as well as other public officials, but to propose the elimination of local school boards, or any other public service governing body, fails to recognize the core values of our American democratic society.

Matt has raised, in fact, a much more serious charge since he asserts that local governance is sinking us morally and economically. As compared to what? He further states that local control is the most sacred principle in American education and it's so deeply ingrained in history and practice that its shortcomings are almost never

articulated. Perhaps Matt has been sheltered from public hearings and public comment periods at local school board meetings. From the perspective of the *National School Boards Association*, our state associations are over 15,000 local school districts, and for me, personally, having been on a local school board for a decade, we witness constant articulation of what school boards should or should not do. So I must differ with his declaration that shortcomings are never articulated.

From another historical perspective, with few exceptions, we know that local school boards' governance evolved not from a strong desire to have exclusive local control of how public education is delivered, but rather, because the states failed to fully assume their responsibility as envisioned by the drafters of the Constitution. And the federal government felt little, if any, significant responsibility until 1954 with the Brown decision and of course, in the '60s during the civil rights era. That being the case, one must ask: were it not for the commitment of local communities to assume responsibility for educating their people, would we be better or worse off?

Now, attacking the role of local governance in education today, one must be willing to acknowledge the very limited acceptance of any substantive responsibility on the part of the federal government, even as late as the 20th century. Of course, today more than ever, we know that there are tremendous challenges now before us to ensure that we compete successfully in the global market, but finding fault and pointing blame is not the answer.

In strategically addressing improvements in public education, the American people must guard against making the easy and erroneous assumption that simply eliminating local school boards will allow somehow – will somehow remedy the problems created by decades of neglect, or that by establishing national standards, we will immediately witness outstanding academic achievement by all students. There is simply no evidence to even suggest that the elimination of local school boards, or the establishment of national standards alone, would improve academic results.

Only recently have other debates surfaced, mostly over the emergence of more alternatives in the delivery of public education, such as public charter schools, alternative schools, public school choice, and virtual schools, particularly if local school boards disapprove any new idea. We encourage such debates, along with increased community engagement in the decision-making process.

However, when local school boards make a final decision, it is understandable that there would be those who would be unhappy, but for opponents of local school boards to use such debates and disagreements among public officials as the basis to advance their own beliefs in eliminating school boards, it is also misleading.

With few exceptions, local school boards welcome new approaches to delivering educational services, and the reality is that the success of these new programs and systems will continue to require an effective governance structure that directly reflects the values and interests of local citizens and remains accountable to them. Proponents of

broad public reforms, including national standards, should not use these emerging reforms as the basis.

Can we do better as a nation? Of course. Local communities, states, and the federal government must work together to make sure that the education of our children is the number one priority. School boards are leading the way in many districts to improve performance and to create schools where children are learning, not just reading and math, but the rich array of substantive skills needed to succeed globally in the 21st century.

Community surveys across this nation continue to identify the local school board as the primary choice for local school governance, as well as for determining how educational programs are delivered, how facilities are constructed and managed, how the instructional administrative and support staffs are recruited, trained, and developed. School boards are also preferred for addressing other educational goals, objectives, and priorities based on the culture, values and commitment of our communities.

In other words, there is the academic, the politics of education, and the business component. Perhaps, rather than to attack local schools boards, such energy should be directed at raising the development, the level of engagement, for all local residents regarding public schools. After all, democracy demands the full participation of its citizens. When that participation declines, all of our democratic principles become challenged, not just local school boards.

Thank you.

MS. BROWN: Great. These are really thoughtful comments from all three, and not quite what I expected. I want to start by asking Matt a question. What do you envision as an appropriate local voice in governance and education, and is there one? Do you see one? Obviously, you see why that would be very different than what we have today.

MR. MILLER: I guess I see – and thanks, by the way, for all their comments. I was glad that Reggie even had a good, apart from the bad news – (laughter) – so that exceeded my expectations. I guess I would say that I'm focused really on big urban districts, as opposed to many of the smaller ones, but my observation of big urban districts and their school boards, from the reporting and research I've done, is that the school boards are very dysfunctional, and I have big questions about what their real value added is. I know that's considered controversial.

But I would say, just as Reggie was saying, that the concept of national standards doesn't mean that you can't have school boards. I would say that not having school boards doesn't mean you don't have local governance, because you have a mayor. And we obviously know there are cities piloting this model of governance, and it's not clear to me why you can't have a single, elected, politically accountable official who oversees the school districts. The success of the schools matters for someone who's a local political executive in our major metropolitan areas in the 21st century. The most important thing

for the kids is their education, and why the mayors can't be expected to be accountable for that, as opposed to the boards, I don't see that there's a major loss to that.

I think the moniker local control is a real misnomer, because very often in these districts, when you talk to actual schools, they feel absolutely bound by bureaucracies from every level. They don't feel like they're locally empowered. However, if you talk to folks at Green Dot Schools, the very promising charter school operator in Los Angeles that's expanding, they do feel a real sense of ownership there.

There they have a union contract that's about four pages long, not 300 pages long, they've got teachers and principals who feel like they're following the standard curriculum that's been set by that system of schools, and yet they're empowered to modify it if they can show that they can deliver better results by departing from what are considered system-wide best practices. I think that idea, right at the schoolhouse level, with parent engagement and with parent committees, is a more meaningful aspect of local control than the kind we have with typical school boards in big urban areas.

MR. FELTON (?): Cindy, did you want a response?

MS. BROWN: Yes, I'd like one from both of you.

MR. FELTON: Okay. Matt, you've raised the issue, which, of course, is that in most cases, when we're talking about lack of performance or poor performance, we're talking about urban school districts. And yet, I think we all understand that within that urban community, that in many cases, there's been tremendous neglect and a tremendous lack of resources. If one looks at the state legislature, one finds that members of the state legislature do not have the political clout to ensure that those urban areas are provided with equitable investments. Obviously, this reality begins to further impact what's happening in our urban districts.

The other issue, which explains why you believe what you believe, is that in most urban communities, there's been a tremendous exodus over the last two decades. Look at Washington D.C. Even in Montgomery County, there were areas in which we were having a very difficult time in terms of performance, and yet the conversation seemed to recognize that in a few more years, middle-class students and families and upper-income families would be back. Does this say that poor families alone can't do it? No, but I think in our political environment, we understand that the presence of a middle class, who can demand and articulate and advocate for public education, makes a difference.

Now, your other point, having to do with local school boards versus other forms, again, we've taken a position on that, and our concern is that when there are mayoral takeovers, we need to be very clear about what the objectives are. What we found in most cases, when there's been that local attempt to take over, is that it's been a fight over the resources and who controls them, with very little discussion on how can we improve the quality of education?

In your urban areas, in particular, where that's been the case, the fight has been over who controls the land of former schools that have been closed, so that those properties can now be placed on the market for investment by condominiums and other sources. So I think that while we continue to have the debate, we have to look at all the factors that certainly impact the community.

MR. ROMER: One size does not fit all, and you can have this argument, and we can continue this for a year or two, about how you do the organization locally, but the simple fact is, there needs to be something local. Now, in LA, we built \$19 billion – billion – worth of local schools. We had to do that locally. And so there needs to be an organization,. There needs to be an organization to handle the athletic issues and the community involvement.

But I want to turn to math. One of the critical problems we've got in this country is that we are not teaching math adequately. And that local school board is not able – I think that's a fair statement – to create a national curriculum of math or a quality one. They have to look somewhere. So you've got to look to the state or to a collection of states or the federal government. As this debate unfolds, we have got to grab ourselves by the collar and say, we're failing, we're really failing pretty badly in teaching math compared to the rest of our competition in the world, and we don't have 30 years to catch up. We've got to catch up quicker. And so somebody in the federal level has got to be smart enough to give us a path where we all can join in at the state and local levels and say, you're right.

Now, let me point to one area that we keep missing, and that's testing. Testing is the key to much of this. It's the quality of the assessment that really determines what a teacher is going to do in the classroom. And I did this in LA. I spent millions of dollars to try to get a periodic diagnostic test in math from kindergarten to ninth grade, and there was not one on the shelf to be bought. And I began to work with national testing agencies, and they were not skilled in doing one diagnostically, because they had been doing a different kind of end-of-term assessment.

And so I was hungering for a national institute on education to say, 'Romer, here's what the rest of the world has done. Here are the best 10 examples out there and here is what, as a federal government, we would offer to you.' You are spending a lot of money. There's no sense of you doing it and then duplicating it in 15 other states. Why don't you just get together, pick one at a time and say, algebra II. Arrive at what you really believe algebra II ought to be in terms of the content, the level of performance and the curriculum that leads to it. And 15 of your states adopt that and then say to the schools, you go out and use your freedom and autonomy to learn how to really teach that.

But if you're doing algebra II at eleventh grade, you've got to back it down to the first grade, because you can't get them ready unless you have the whole content. I want to direct this debate toward that issue, rather than get into how we divide up the power of the local community, because if we don't get hold of that one within a period of three to four years, the next Microsoft companies are all going to be in India or somewhere else.

And we're going to have an excess of jobs that's much greater than the one we see today in Ohio.

MS. BROWN: I want to ask one sort of complicated question of the panelists and then we'll open it to the audience. So Reggie talked about a shortcoming in Matt's paper about a strategy for achieving public support for standards and greater finances. Actually, Roy has laid out a strategy around standards. It's basically a model that's been proposed by *Achieve*. I do sometimes wonder, starting with algebra II, if the urgency that Matt discusses doesn't require faster movement than that and on a greater range of subjects, but I actually think standards is the easy part of it, or relatively easy. This is all difficult.

I don't know how we're going to build the case for greater financial equity in this country. We have problems at all three levels. We don't fund schools fairly within school districts, including big districts. It's been stunning, some of the recent research about differences, and for per pupil expenditures within school districts for lots of poor kids. We know we don't fund schools equitably at the state level, though there's been progress in a number of states with school finance.

We don't fund – the federal role in education is to focus on disadvantaged kids, and it turns out that even in the title one formula, our big program for schools with large concentrations of low-income kids, that states are penalized if they don't have a very strong tax base. It turns out that you get a chunk of that money based on your per pupil expenditure where the states can invest more than others. I don't know how we make this public case for greater financial equity, and I'd be interested in our panelists' views about it. I actually think all three would like that, but I don't know how to make the case, but they're closer to the political case-making world than I am.

MR. MILLER: Well, I don't have a full answer, and to me, that's the huge question. And, as I said before, especially when you look at what other countries do - even countries that the conservative side of the U.S. political spectrum hails for the different choice and options that they offer in their school system - they just routinely take it as a given in their culture that you equitably fund schools, or give more money, if kids in these schools come from more disadvantaged backgrounds, because they need it. That is just a common sense value that basically, every other advanced nation, but ours, holds. Ours is the legacy of local control, which has meant locally based financing.

Obviously, the best thing would be if it reached the presidential level in debate, so that you actually have a conversation about it, because you almost never hear this discussion in the U.S. at all. The only place you see it is with lawyers who've pushed the fiscal equity movement in the states for the last 30 years, and they've made some strides. I don't know how many gazillion states are tied up in court now over their inequitable school financing within the states. But as Cindy said, it's not just within state; it's within the district and it's between states. The biggest gaps are between the richer states and the poorer states.

And the thing that bothers me most about this – this is not a full answer obviously, to the question of how to crack the politics of this – is that we all talk about teachers and teacher quality. NCLB has the ‘thou shalt have a quality teacher in every classroom requirement,’ and that’s the biggest unfunded mandate there is, because you cannot attract a new generation of high caliber college students to spend a career in teaching, given the starting salary and salary trajectories that we now offer in teaching, especially when, if you compare a high poverty area, say, an urban area with its nearby affluent suburbs.,the suburbs pay teachers more, they have much better working conditions, and they have kids who come to school without anything like the plethora of problems that they come to school with in the high poverty areas.

And so over time, it shouldn’t be any surprise that the best teachers gravitate to the best suburban schools and that we’re relying on missionaries essentially to staff the schools that have the highest needs kids. That is wrong. And I guess I think we need campaigns on this to actually get the ball rolling. And that’s totally tied to our system of school finance because as folks know, teachers and principals are the bulk of any school budget, except when Roy gets 19 billion at some point from some bonds to spend on some better facilities. So the first step is to have a conversation about this issue and get more exposure, including from the media.

MR. ROMER: I think the key to this is the financial key, the economics of this country. I think what you see in the subprime mortgage crisis, which has now evolved into other concerns in this country about, are my children are going to be able to afford the house we now live in and have the lifestyle that we now have as a family? That’s going to penetrate American politics very deep and very quickly. And I think that business already knows this. They see this answer. They have globalized, they have paid very much attention to the development of human capital, and there is a connection to be made politically and economically in this country that we are not going to make it the way we’re going.

Look at where the dollar is today. We cannot make it unless we increase the productivity of our citizens. We cannot do that without better schools. And there’s got to be then a grand bargain put on the table. It takes guts, it takes creativity politically, and it’s got to happen in the next three to five years. This nation, if you just look at our balance of payment deficit, et cetera, we are losing our competitive edge. And I think that while you can appeal to the American public in terms of their moral conscience or whatever, their pocketbook is the thing that they’re going to respond to quickest. And I think, therefore, that there is a connection between the federal government and improving the quality of education, and putting that on the line is really right. We’ve just got to get out of the traditional small thinking.

My last sentence is, as I look at today’s election and watched the political debate in the last five days that relates to that election, I still believe that democracy works, but I’ve got to tell you, we are not talking about the issues that are going to change the direction of this nation, and it’s just terrible. And I read in the *Washington Post* this morning about the polls. Two percent are interested, or say their main interest is

education. We've got to get that changed in America. It takes dramatic thinking. That's why I really appreciate Matt putting this issue on the table. But as the chairman of *Strong American Schools*, I can see time and time again, talking to candidate staff, the notion that 'I'm not going to send my candidate into Iowa and talk about the federal role in education, man.' We have got to be much smarter, much bolder and much more collaborative than we're being now to solve this problem.

MR. FELTON: I think the whole issue of equity in education, and we are probably closer on that than on other issues, continues to be a problem, but there's an inequity in almost every facet of American life. The students that we're talking about who are not doing well, we can remove the word education, and we could put healthcare, we could put housing, and we could put employment. The fact remains that in this country, we have not figured out yet what our commitment is to those who do not do well.

We talk about the concerns of the business community, while again, across this nation, there are many local businesses and national businesses that are very much concerned with improving the quality of education, but at the same time, these are the same internationally owned companies that look at the bottom line, and if they can pay an engineer in this country \$30 an hour and can pay an engineer in another country \$9 an hour or \$5 an hour, that's where they're going. So this is a much more complex situation than how much we're spending in education. It's a matter of what is the political will and what are we really willing to do as a community to ensure that educational opportunities are available for all of our residents in this nation?

MS. BROWN: Thank you. Tough challenges. I want to open it to the audience. I want to first ask if there are any media people that want to ask a question. Yes, in the back.

Q: (Off mike.)

MS. BROWN: Hang on, hang on. We'll give you a microphone, and say your name and magazine again.

Q: Thanks. Josh Patashnik with the *New Republic* magazine. On the question of financing, I want to ask you: so you suggest that Title I funding could be sort of reworked to give more money to the districts that aren't spending as much. How would you do that in a way that sort of wouldn't create an incentive for states and districts to lower their spending? It seems like the one good thing you could say about the current structure is that it gives states and localities an incentive to spend more of their own tax dollars. How would you sort of restructure that in a way that wouldn't create a perverse incentive for states to lower their local spending?

MR. MILLER: I think there are ways. And this is part of a broader point, I guess, that is when I talk about more federal money, or big pots of new federal money being put in the pot, and the paper talks about anywhere from \$80 billion to \$150 billion a year,

depending on which option you like, it always has to be money in exchange for reform and money conditioned on certain behavior by states and localities. And I think there are ways to require states and localities for maintenance of effort or holding harmless. There are various strategies that have been used in the past that require the recipient of the money to actually maintain certain levels of effort in order to get and qualify for the new resources. So I don't think that's beyond the mind of man to figure out.

MS. BROWN: Right. And also some people proposing changes would put in an effort factor, and a cost of living factor, of course, but not just straight per pupil expenditure, because then a rich state with a little effort might be able to generate a lot of money.

MR. ROMER: Could I add to that answer?

MS. BROWN: Sure.

MR. ROMER: I think we've got the wrong mechanism to fund. I just think to pour that money into a system that doesn't have adequate standards, that does not have the right kind of requirement to have quality teachers, is not a good expenditure. We need to back up and make a grand bargain. We need to find a new way, and I think the new way – and I don't want to overdo this – is to begin with the quality and authenticity of the testing system in the United States. If you really begin to develop tests that are authentic and are the proper tests, it leads to professional development, it leads to curriculum alignment, it leads to a whole lot of things. I think the federal government can get very creative in creating a new model for putting money into this system that gets much more bang for the buck.

Q: (Inaudible) – CNA Corporation in Virginia. The question I have is for you, governor. You had talked about getting all the governors to come together. Two questions: why couldn't *the Education Commission of the States* just do that right now? And when you look at governors, they really don't have statutory authority for education. So if the governor of Virginia comes in for four years and then he leaves, how much weight can you direct to the governors to do this?

MR. ROMER: *The Education Commission of the States* is a great organization. But it doesn't have the weight, the clout to do this at all. You've got to use the bully pulpit of the president of the United States to get this done. And what I'm suggesting is that in Matt's scheme of things, you've got to put more responsibility in governors, because you can't run this nation just from Washington, and the 50 governors are what we got, and you need to go to them and say, 'let me give you a deal.' They want to do the right thing.

And my scenario would be that you get 15 to do it voluntarily and you say to the other 35, that you can join in, or if you don't agree on the specific way these 15 are put together, put together your own group of 15, but you eventually are going to grow toward

an American set of standards. And it's going to be voluntary, but it's going to have such an incentive from the federal government in it that nobody's going to be outside of it.

MR. FELTON: There are a lot of folks who are questioning whether there's been the kind of leveraging with state money that should be going on now. And in most cases, that's not the way the federal government initially invested in education. And so the question remains now if the federal government is not committed to increasing its funding significantly, then what means do they have, which ways will they leverage the federal investment, so that states begin to invest more? Now, you still will have inequity because you look at a state like Mississippi versus a much wealthier state, and so again, we'll have to figure out how to address that issue as well.

MS. BROWN: The one in the back there.

Q: My name's Sam Brady, and I'm a student, so I guess I'm in the trenches. One question I have, and I haven't heard a lot on, is what kind of institution do you think we should have to train teachers to teach, because after all, it's not just about resources and money and taxes and who pays for what. It's about knowledge, and any people who are able to teach. So do you think that the Prussian, 18th century style National Academy of Teachers is a good idea? And if so, can we afford it? Do we have the resources to afford such an institution?

MR. MILLER: I'm not going to have an expert answer on the teacher training question because I haven't studied it enough, but I do have a point of view that the current schools of education are failing us dismally. And lots of people have worked on this for years, and I do think we're going to need other kinds of alternative institutions that do a better job of preparing people that also have a lot more prestige. So it's not just considered a kind of backwater of a campus that's a cash cow for a big university, which is the way they are too often viewed today, but Roy or Reggie may have more concrete ideas on it.

MR. FELTON: I was going to say from our perspective, that we agree that there is an issue in terms of teacher prep. When we talk to many of the teacher prep organizations, they are concerned with also updating and making their curriculum more current and more relevant. But the reality is, one, first of all, there's not the enrollment in teacher prep as historically we've had. And two, for those who are enrolled, they don't stay very long, because of income needs that simply aren't being met.

So what we need to do, in our view, is to have options and alternatives for who is in the classroom. Now, I know I'm not going to have a lot of agreement, and certainly, there's a lot of unions that disagree with it, but the reality is there are those who have the content and simply just do not know how to teach. And we've got to figure out how to make use of those in our community who are in laboratories and institutions who are willing to partner with teachers in our school district, and that's one of our concerns.

MR. ROEMER: I'd like to speak about this. This is the key question - it is the quality of teaching. It's the key question. Look, there are many ways that you're going to have to train, and yes, the National Academy of Teaching is not enough. You need to have a variety of ways you teach. What you have to have is a way to measure the effectiveness of teaching. That eventually will back up into how you train a person to do it. You've got to measure the effectiveness of the product. And that will begin to tell you what are the qualities and characteristics and skill sets and knowledge bases you need to be an effective teacher? Now, how do you measure the effectiveness of teachers? You do it by what is the result of their contact with students.

So I want to go back to this assessment issue that I laid on the table earlier. You need to have a very authentic way of saying, this is what we expect out of this educational experience. This is the way we measure it, this is the way we teach and here are a variety of ways to get there, and then you judge the quality of teaching by measuring their effectiveness. Now, that is something that's very tough; it needs to have a lot of study. But I don't know of any other profession in the world in which you do not measure the effectiveness of the participants. And if we can't get there, we're never going to be able to define what is a good teacher and how do you train for it, and how you compensate for it.

MS. BROWN: Rick Kahlenberg.

Q: Okay. Hi. Rick Kahlenberg with *The Century Foundation*. Congratulations, Matt, on a terrific paper, and I enjoyed the *Atlantic* piece as well. I have a question about the politics, like Cindy did. I thought it was unusual for someone who's trying to promote something to highlight that this would be bad for teacher unions, that it would decrease their power. It seems to me that there is an argument to the teacher unions that this would be good for them, and certainly, this was true when Al Shanker argued for national standards in the mid-1990s. I think you may have more allies there than you realize. And so my question is, if you were meeting with the presidents of the NEA and AFT, what case would you make to them that this is a good idea, that it's good for teachers, because I think to my mind, that's the key to getting the politics of this solved.

MR. MILLER: The main argument I would make, and I've had dialogues about this more with Sandy Feldman, who has passed away, obviously, and some with Randi Weingarten. But the main argument I would make is that first, you appeal to what was their deep desire to actually better educate kids, especially disadvantaged kids. And I want to put big new pots of federal money on the table, much of it that will go, if I was a benevolent dictator, to recruiting a new generation of teaching talent to the toughest hard-to-teach kids.

But that money is conditioned on different reforms and the way we allow the money to get spent, so it can be spent more effectively, so that they allow differential pay, so that we bring all teachers up to some sort of minimum - some ideas which I wrote about in an earlier book. But I still don't think it was honest in talking about what the flaw is with local control today. I think you can't do that without calling out how

dysfunctional the behavior is of many big urban school boards where the unions end up controlling and are on both sides of the table, the way Roy says.

When I hear all the discussion about local democracy and blah, blah, blah, blah, and I understand that, and I'm as American and small "D" democratic as anybody else, but let's get real. The election for school boards, what's the turnout rate, 15 percent, 20 percent if we're lucky in these big urban areas? They are totally dominated by the unions except when some groups of businessmen get together and try to muster an effort for a few years to put in a reform slate, then it falls back.

And I think it's unproductive and not good for the education of the kids, the way this stuff works. So I guess I'd be asking unions to be part of a movement to change the way the federal role in education works, acknowledging that that may mean some changes at the local level that still leave them with a tremendously outsized voice in education, but that also allows us to have room for innovations that are good for the country.

MR. FELTON: The only point I want to add to that is that the presence of unions and other interest groups, that presence doesn't stop at the local school board election. Those folks are involved in the election of every level within this country. So what are you proposing – what are you saying? You're saying it's okay for unions and interest groups to support other elected officials?

MR. MILLER: Yes, I think school board elections in big urban districts, from my research and observation, are kind of uniquely dysfunctional.

MR. FELTON: No, no. The question is, should interest groups be barred from –

MR. MILLER: Of course not.

MR. FELTON: Okay. So what's –

MR. MILLER: I think there's a problem with the way it works in school boards.

MR. ROMER: Let me just say just structurally, I strongly believe in unions representing their members and also participating in elections. We ought to be pragmatic about it. When you get into a district like LA, it's too large and the money is what counts. And it's just not a good way to do business. And that doesn't mean I'm anti-union because we've done work there.

Let me go back to the fundamental question that's been asked. We really need to bring the unions in as a strong, strong advocate of this. I would like to go to Finland with them and say, let's do in our country what Finland does in terms of how culturally we value teachers and how we compensate teachers. Do you follow? It's more difficult to get into teacher schools in Finland than it is the legal school. And that's what we want to try to create, and we ought to do that with the union.

MS. BROWN: I want to give a voice to our friend – (off mike).

Q: I'm Jim Loewen. I'm –

MS. BROWN: Next after – after him, then we'll go –

Q: Oh, did I take the wrong –

MS. BROWN: No, no, that's okay. We have time for both.

Q: Jim Loewen, I wrote this book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, about what's wrong with how we teach history, and I want to say that this has been a very interesting conversation, but I'm not sure that federalism or nationalism is the right answer, because in history, we already have it. That is, we have a national curriculum. There are six – it used to be 12 but now there are six textbooks used nationally. And they're not really six different ones because they're clones of each other. And so we essentially have one national curriculum in U.S. history. And I've got to tell you, from intense reading of that textbook, if you will, that ain't so good. It's gotten bigger and bigger and it's gotten worse and worse in certain ways. Read the book.

I agree with the issue on testing. With Nickleby (ph), we have increasing numbers of tests across the U.S. in history, and the only thing worse than having these tests is not having them, because if you don't have one, then history doesn't get taught at all, particularly because you're only teaching those subjects that are tested. And almost without exception, the exceptions being Rhode Island and Vermont, that I know of, the tests are multiple choice tests in history, which we might call tweak tests. And they are not specific enough. And this is also a problem in math and in other subjects. We're teaching too broadly, too many things without mastery and without going into them in depth.

We need to reverse Serrano (ph). But I'm not sure how federal control helps, because I already see it happening in history, and in history, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, we're farther behind in history than we are in math or science or any other subject.

MR. ROMER (?): Can I take the first crack at that? I make a distinction between history and math and science and language arts. I would leave history last. I would give a great deal of flexibility in history. I wouldn't go at this at all initially, but what you point out is that the multiple choice tests are terrible. It's not what we want to teach somebody to do. That's why I'm coming back to let's get authentic tests, let's get the way in which we can authentically test students. There are some multiple choices that work, but many response questions need to be done.

It's a matter of finances; it's tough to do. This is where the federal government could really help. But I just want to say specifically on history, you need to have a

relationship with curriculum, whether it's local, state or national, which is a constant interplay, a constant dialogue. A system has got to leave room for changes of use. I lived in Colorado and graduated high school 1946, 10 miles from a Japanese relocation camp. My nation was rewriting the history of the Japanese American right in front of my eyes. I understand how we react to these things.

MR. MILLER (?): One thing I'd add on that is the thing you point out – Roy mentioned it also – is that we already have de facto national standards in a bunch of areas through the textbook industry. So the way to frame the conversation is if we already have them, but we're just not owning up to it, the right conversation is how to make them the right ones, and how to make them better and how to learn from what other countries or great states are doing to make them as good as they need to be now.

Q: I'm Neil McCluskey with the Cato Institute. And my question is, and I think Mr. Miller, you mentioned this, the problem right now is that far too often, the interest of the adults in the system is really put ahead of the children's. So we've talked about the unions. They totally understand that they are seeking the highest pay they can get with really limited accountability, just like I'd love to get paid \$1 million to have no one tell me what to do.

What is it about the federal government that you think very specifically insulates policy making from the interests of the adults over the children versus the local district, versus the state? Or is there an important thing that we have to look at where we actually empower the parents, not the governments, to have a lot of say themselves, so they can hold the adults accountable for their kids, rather than saying, we think one level of government is more insulated from politics than another?

MR. MILLER: I guess I'd say I don't think any level is insulated. Obviously, there's politics at the federal level, but I think if the feds put a big pot of money on the table, and conditioned it on a number of reforms, I think you'd be able to make progress. You need to put a big pot of money to let urban districts, districts that came together with a plan to implement different kinds of pay schedules for teachers, have math and science and special education teachers, who a real sort of specialty, get more.. Everyone's salary should go up some, but we need to have much bigger differentials in pay than the unions will today allow. I think the federal government can play a role in that. In terms of if you need bottom-up pressure on the system also., I'm sympathetic to the idea of the – what's it called - the Weighted Student Funding?

MS. BROWN: Yes.

MR. MILLER: What's the buzz word now?

MS. BROWN: Weighted Student Funding.

MR. MILLER: And that's going to take some time to try to get traction on, but the idea that the money should follow the kids and that provides some kind of pressure in

a system with more and more charter schools and Green Dots and KIPs and stuff like that, I think is an important part of the picture.

MR. FELTON: I just want to comment again on the federal investment. Granted, if the federal government put a big pot of money, and if the federal government had some leverage with that big pot of money, there could be some progress. I don't think any of us are arguing that. The reality is the federal government has promised to put big pots, and they've never done it, and there's no prospects anytime soon that they will. So what happens is, the promise – the rules come with the promise of funding, the funding doesn't come, the mandates stay, and then we have this situation where we're trying to figure out how do we make it work? I think we all understand how it could work, what is the reality.

MS. BROWN: Michel Dannenberg.

Q: Michael Dannenberg with the New America Foundation. Matt, congratulations on an ambitious paper. I want to drill down on a point on school finance that's raised in the paper. You describe the problem as one being of inequity among kids. I think you mentioned \$5,000 versus \$10,000 in differences per child. And your proposals are two, one which you mentioned, which is that the federal funding would go to states and districts in a way to raise up adequacy to bear minimum.

The second proposal, which you didn't mention, I don't think, in your remarks, was that there would be equity amongst adults, that a certain tax percentage would generate the same amount of revenue, irrespective of the school district or state, to ensure equity for adults. But there's a disconnect between the problem identification of equity for children and the two proposed solutions of adequacy for children or equity for adults. My question is: what's the reason behind that disconnect? Is it simply politics, you can't get equity for children? Is it because you don't have an answer for how to get equity for children, or is it because the real problem is adequacy for children or equity for adults?

MR. MILLER: If I understand – you may have to fill in more blanks on what you're saying, because I don't pretend to have all the answers on how to implement this, and one of the proposals I showcased that you mentioned was one that I'm citing Goodwin Liu from Berkeley, who's written a lot on school finance and talks about trying to equalize having the feds essentially provide insurance to poor states or poor property or wealthy states, so that for a given level of tax effort, they can reach a certain level of per-pupil spending.

I guess I don't see that. You're calling that equity for adults, and I guess I don't see that equity for adults, because it's going to schooling which is for kids. So I'm not sure what you mean by that as being equity for adults, as opposed to for the kids. If you mean, why don't the feds give a direct voucher to a family usable for schools, people can talk about that. I guess I'm not –

Q: Districts and states could use different tax rates. You have different levels of – (inaudible) – per child.

MR. MILLER: But they do today.

Q: (Inaudible) – it's an answer to your problem – (off mike).

MS. BROWN: I think he was arguing here, you basically are arguing for Weighted Student Funding.

MR. MILLER: Well, I'd like to see that down the road, but I wasn't smart enough in this paper to figure out how to get the whole shebang, so I'm just trying to put some ideas out there for ways we can get more money from the feds to localities conditioned on them deciding to address this. That's not a fully satisfactory answer, I'm sure.

MS. BROWN: This can be continued later. The guy next to Michael.

Q: My name is Eric Welch. I'm a teacher at J.E.B. Stuart High School. I don't know if there are any other teachers in the room today, and I was able to sneak out of the classroom this morning to be able to come to this. From a teacher's perspective, just a quick comment: I agree with standards nationally. In some ways, maybe not all teachers do. I actually also, Matt, as a union member, I'm not offended at all by your union comments. I think they're very true.

But from the standard perspective, and from looking at it as a teacher, is it possible to make as the first standard, teaching kids how to learn? I think if we say math, and you may laugh at that, but mentoring students, teaching them how to do school. I think if we still put math standards, science standards out there, without first dealing with the 40 to 50 percent of our population, whether they be immigrants, or whether they have parents that work two jobs, we'll still have serious problems.,

So I'm just wondering from a national standpoint, or maybe even the local standpoint of Fairfax County where I work, we have the AVID program, which we're trying to teach kids to do well in terms of mentoring. Is it possible to get down on the plate as a national standard? Let's teach kids how to learn and mentor them, so they know then how to learn science and learn math.

MR. MILLER: I guess to me, that's wrapped up when it gets to the financing and stuff, is that there are other countries where it's routine that kids who come from backgrounds where they may not learn, they come to school equipped with the kinds of disciplines that make them ready for learning, that there's more money for those schools to be able to cook up programs that help do this stuff. So I think that's important. I don't know what other –

MR. ROMER: I understand your question, but I don't want to separate teaching a child how to learn from teaching him math, because I feel every content course -- math, science, whatever -- by a great teacher is also going to include aspects for that individual child of, hey, this is a process of learning, and we're using this content today to help you develop that process. I think they're connected, but I get your point. There are many children who simply don't know how to apply their own personal discipline to the school day, and I think that was what you were aiming at.

MR. FELTON: Again, from our perspective, there are many discussions ongoing about how do you create a learning environment so that the student arrives wanting to learn and is committed to learning and engaged and enthusiastic about learning, which as we understand in many schools doesn't exist. So the question becomes how much of a role should government play in creating that will to learn and commitment to learn within a school? And those issues are being debated now.

MR. MILLER: If I could just mention briefly, I don't want to leave the impression that I'm anti-union. It's kind of like Obama says, 'I'm not anti-war; I'm anti-dumb war.' I'm not anti-union; I'm anti-dumb union. I think if you look at what Andy Stern is doing with the SEIU in various ways in the national debate today, it's unbelievably important. What Sandy Feldman did or Shanker, what Randi is trying to do in shaping the debate, and she may have a more prominent role, I just think if we're honest, we've got to acknowledge there's a bunch of behavior that unions engage in today that are counterproductive, and that we have to work with them to change it so that we're all aligned for the best interest of kids.

MR. ROMER: Can I pick up on that last question? That last question is a very good question. How do you teach children how to learn? And it came to me, the difference of doing science when it gets to memorizing something about a table. There's a richness about teaching somebody how to learn, how to problem solve. And we just need to think about that as we think about how we test. We test upon this multiple choice, what do you remember from history or from whatever? But learning is not remembering facts. Learning is applying those facts to the real world.

And that's why I want to -- before I leave here again -- to emphasize to people in this room, much of our problem is rooted in the inadequate and unauthentic tests that we use. I used to train people to fly airplanes, and there's an authentic test. You get in there and you sit with them and you say, land the plane and they come in, and they bounce it, and you pull off to the side and say, this is a test that has consequences, my life, my life! (Laughter.)

There is something about a test that if it's authentic, you back up from it and then you go back and try that landing again and again until you do it right. Tests are critical and we're not paying enough attention to them. We talk about all these requirements and the Leave No Child Behind and all these things, but we aren't examining how we really hold a child accountable for what we've done all day or all week or all year, and that's the authenticity of the test.

MR. FELTON: But again, as we've said before, this is a very complex issue. As a practical matter in Montgomery County, they realized that students in elementary school weren't excited about science, and what could the board then do about that? And again, after some study, what we realized is that in elementary school, which was predominantly taught, at least at that time, by women whom we then talked with, they said they had their own bias against science. They just didn't like it. It wasn't that they didn't know it; they didn't like it. And therefore, as part of the day's teaching, they weren't as enthusiastic about science as other issues.

So what do we do as a practical matter? We developed what was called science kits which made it easier and much more practical for elementary school teachers, who didn't major in science and math, to be able to follow a curriculum where more and more students were engaged. Now, that made a difference. Now, should that then be mandated across the country? Probably not. But the issue is within those communities; there are times when you can say, how can I get more students engaged? And whether it's again the valid and reliable assessment or improved curricula, it can be done. I think our concern and our challenge in this room is that it's not happening enough throughout the entire country.

MS. BROWN: Okay. Two last questions. One in the back and the woman back here also.

Q: Good morning. Okay. My name is Callie Kozlak, and I work with *The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights*, and my organization works very closely with low-income and minority parents. So this question is for Mr. Felton. A lot of parents that we speak to in various parts of the country feel that the buck stops with the school board, with issues of discipline or the quality of the curriculum or school services, that all that decision-making is happening at the local school board level. And often times, it's protecting the administration or teachers, and that they don't have a voice in that. And my question to you and everyone – feel free for others to chime in – is how do parents get their voices heard and how can they be a greater part of the governance at the local level beyond the PTA and so forth?

MR. FELTON: Well, certainly, one of the issues we talk about as the key work of school boards is that they increase their community engagement, and in fact, they figure out how to include parents, particularly parents of students in poverty, often minority parents, so that they do believe that they have a say. As a practical matter, we know that historically, the PTA, while a very, very good organization, didn't necessarily figure out how to reach parents who weren't fully engaged.

And so what we've said from the *National School Boards'* perspective, unless you engage parents and unless they are partners in this challenge that we have to ensure that their children learn, then we will not be successful. So we went and made that a major principle, and we've also developed, at some local schools, , the performance management program, so that principals become evaluated based on how well they are, in

fact, involving those parents whom you speak to. So again, there's not a one-size-fits-all solution across the board. It's the recognition and commitment that unless we have these parents involved, then we're not going to be successful, and how we involve them has to vary depending on those local needs.

MS. BROWN: Okay. Last question, back there.

Q: Mal Kline, CampusReportOnline.net. We've done like 30 stories on No Child Left Behind, and although the proponents cannot name one single school that's gotten better, you can't talk to a parent who can't point to a good one that's gotten worse. How do you avoid this pitfall with national standards?

MS. BROWN: Let me just say, if you come here next Monday, we're going to show you some schools, high poverty schools, that have gotten better,. We'll be talking about a report from *New Leaders for New Schools*. So that's my first comment about that, but do you want to –

MR. ROMER: I'll make a very quick comment. If I understand the question, will national standards lead to better schools? I think if we do it right, yes. I just talked about it from LA. When I went to LA, we adopted higher standards, elementary schools particularly, and we increased the performance of those students at a rate of 150 percent over the average student in California over a six-year period. Standards really work if you've got the follow-up to create good teaching.

MS. BROWN: Okay. Thank you very much. I want to thank our panelists. This has been a very interesting conversation.

(Applause.)

(END)