The idea of standards

and ministry of education, because of mutual fear that it would inevitably impose someone else’s unwanted ideas into local schools.

To be successful, NESIC, the new federal panel created to certify national standards, will have to be strictly nonpolitical and nonpartisan, in the same way that government statistical agencies are. If NESIC approves standards that are not high or if it acts politically, its credibility as well as the credibility of the national standards it certifies will quickly be lost. Clear national standards can help to support excellence in education only if they are benchmarked to the best practices here and abroad and exemplify the learning that can be achieved under the best circumstances.

The purpose of setting standards is to raise expectations for all students. The object is not to make school more difficult, but to make instruction more challenging and engaging and to establish goals that the entire educational system will strive to reach. “World-class” performance will be reached not by producing a generation of smart robots, but by encouraging students to think about what they are learning and to become actively involved in their own education. The movement for standards is grounded in the faith that every human being is born with the capacity to learn, that the job of education is to improve the ability of people to use their minds well, and that expectations and incentives affect effort. Proponents believe that standards can be a lever for both excellence and equity. They argue that too little is expected of almost all American students and that the challenge to American education is to educate every youngster for full participation in the modern technological society.

The United States has begun the process of creating national standards. Although much remains to be resolved, one thing is clear. The development of national standards with the support of the federal government represents dramatic change in a nation whose educational system has always been extremely decentralized. How did it happen? Why did it happen? Will it improve education? These are some of the questions to be considered in the following pages.

A Historical Perspective

To many, the movement for national standards and assessments seems a startling turn of events, a development unprecedented in American history. The fact is that American education has a long history of standard-setting activity, sometimes overt and purposeful, at other times implicit and haphazard. The current movement is grounded in a long tradition of efforts to establish agreement on what American students should know and be able to do and to measure whether and how well they have learned what was expected of them. Yet, despite this history of standard setting sponsored by various public and private agencies, never before has the federal government attempted to establish explicit national standards for what American children should learn in school.

Standards in Nineteenth Century Schools

The development of public education in the United States—the common school movement—coincided with the onset of waves of
immigration from Ireland, Germany, and elsewhere in the 1840s and 1850s. As the nation's diversity grew, the schools promoted social cohesion by teaching a common language and shared civic values. The heralds of the common school, especially Horace Mann, described it as the great equalizer of opportunity. As secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, Mann championed the public's responsibility to provide equal opportunity, which in turn meant that the state had to play a larger role, monitoring access and quality. Needless to say, equality of educational opportunity—a critical aspect of Mann's vision—implied that schools would not be wildly dissimilar in kind or quality.

Making sure that all children have access to schools that offer education of similar, high quality has been a primary reason to establish standards. Over the years standards—some purposeful, some serendipitous—have evolved to foster some degree of similarity in the quality of schooling, such as:

- The use of identical or similar textbooks
- The specification of requirements for high school graduation or college entrance
- The use of standardized or comparable achievement tests for promotion or college admission
- The prescription of curriculum patterns (for example, so many years of English, history, and so forth, as well as certain sequences of courses, such as biology, chemistry, and physics)
- The professionalization of teacher training, with shared norms and expectations (that is, standards)

Although critics periodically rebel against the constraints and stifling effects of conformity, uniformity, and standardization, educators and legislators have spent a great deal of time and attention trying to establish shared norms, expectations, and standards to achieve efficiency, equality, or both. This tension between the search for order and the rejection of conformity is healthy; Americans value individualism and imagination far too much to embrace mechanistic pre-

scriptions. Nonetheless, the effort to ensure equal access to a good education for all students inevitably requires some form of standards.

After the American Revolution, Webster's "Blue-backed" speller provided something akin to a national standard for many years. Webster's speller was used not only in school but by adults for self-education; the speller set a national standard for spelling and pronunciation, as Webster had hoped. In the early nineteenth century, however, the Webster speller lost its near-monopoly as other book publishers turned out competing books in every subject. As early as the 1830s, school reformers complained about the burgeoning number of textbooks in every field. Despite the multiplicity of titles, however, the content of the books was more like than unlike. In some fields, one or two series, such as the McGuffey's reading books, dominated the market. The reading series that competed with McGuffey's looked much like McGuffey's, even including some of the same stories and poems. The similarity of the nineteenth century readers, history books, geography texts, and others vying for market share in the same subject area is striking. The uniformity found in the reading materials extended to classroom methods, with few exceptions.

American schools for most of the nineteenth century by and large had content standards, as defined by relatively uniform classroom materials, and they even had an implicit consensus about performance standards, with a broadly shared scale that ranged from A to F or from 100 to 60. It was not exact, but educators had a common vocabulary with which to gauge student performance.

Because no state or national testing systems had yet been developed, college admission requirements provided the only reliable external standard for student performance in early America. Each college had its own entrance requirements, and the president of the college and members of the faculty examined prospective students. The first admission requirement to Harvard in 1642 read: "When any Scholar is able to read Tully or such like classical Latin Author except, and make and speak true Latin in verse and prose, suo (ut aiunt) Marte, and decline perfectly the paradigms of nouns and verbs in ye Greeke tongue, then may he bee admitted into ye College, nor shall any claim admission before such qualifications." (Suus, vestro, or nostro Marte was a Latin proverb meaning by one's own exertions, without any help whatever.) The only significant addition to the college curriculum in colonial times was arithmetic, which appeared for the first time in the entrance requirements for Yale in
"That none may expect to be admitted into this College unless upon Examination of the President and Tutors, They shall be found able Extempore to Read, Construe and Parce Tully, Virgil and the reek Testament; and to write True Latin in Prose and to understand the rules of Prosodia, and common Arithmetic, and Shall bring Sufficient Testimony of his Blameless and Inoffensive Life."

As time went by, college entrance requirements became both broader and more specific. That is, they expanded to include more subjects, such as algebra, geometry, English grammar, science, modern foreign languages, history, and geography, but they also became more specific about the literary works that students had to master before their examination. Thus, Columbia College declared in 1785: No candidate shall be admitted into the College . . . unless he shall be able to render into English Caesar's Commentaries of the Gallic War; the four Orations of Cicero against Catiline; the four first books of Virgil's Aeneid; and the Gospels from the Greek; and to explain the government and connections of the words, and to turn English to grammatical Latin, and shall understand the four first rules of rhetoric, with the rule of three." Although the works required varied somewhat, the three constants in Latin were Cicero, Virgil, and Caesar. Students prepared themselves in accordance with these content standards and presented themselves for examination at the college of their choice.

In retrospect the requirements appear fairly uniform, yet the entrance requirements of different colleges varied enough to frustrate headmasters of academies and secondary schools. Headmasters complained of "unreasonable diversity," and students had to learn the specific text or oration that was demanded by the college of their choice. Consequently, in the late nineteenth century, several associations were created to promote closer relations among schools and colleges and, especially, uniformity of college admission requirements. The collaboration was good for the schools, because it relieved them of the burden of preparing students for a wide variety of entrance examinations; it also benefited the colleges, because it enabled them to influence the curriculum of the secondary schools.

The Committee of Ten

As the last decade of the nineteenth century opened, many educators believed that the addition of new subjects had turned the high school curriculum into an anarchic mess. In 1892, in an effort to promote uniformity of curricular offerings in the high schools, the National Educational Association established a panel called the Committee of Ten to make recommendations to improve the curricula of the nation's high schools. The chairman was Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University, and one of the most esteemed educators of his era. The committee included William T. Harris, the U.S. Commissioner of Education (and former superintendent in St. Louis); four other college presidents; and three high school principals (the tenth member was a college professor). The committee surveyed forty high schools and discovered that they offered thirty-six different subjects, including five foreign languages, six mathematics courses, four science courses, and a few miscellaneous courses such as stenography, penmanship, and music. This seeming disorder in 1890 stands in sharp contrast to the more than 2,100 course titles reported to the U.S. Office of Education in the mid-1970s.

The Committee of Ten was the first national "blue ribbon panel" to study the curriculum of the high school. Since then, many forests have been felled to print the reports of countless committees, commissions, panels, task forces, and study groups on the needs or future of American education. But in 1892, there was no precedent for a national body to issue recommendations to the many thousands of school districts, nor was there any mechanism to promote or require compliance. The committee had no way of knowing whether anyone would heed its proposals. Nonetheless, because of the stature of its members and sponsors, as well as the novelty of the undertaking, the committee's report received widespread attention and achieved some measure of influence upon the curricula of many schools.
The College Entrance Examination Board

Another product of the movement in the 1890s to establish uniform standards for high school graduation and college entry was the College Entrance Examination Board. The Board was created to provide a common examination for college entrance, which was intended to ensure a level playing field for all applicants. This was seen as important for fairness and to promote educational equity. The Board's first examination was administered in 1896, and it quickly became a standard part of the college entrance process.

The Board's examination consisted of four sections: English, mathematics, sciences, and a foreign language. These sections were designed to assess a student's knowledge and skills in a variety of areas. The Board's approach was to provide a fair and objective measure of a student's abilities, which would help colleges make informed decisions about acceptance.

The College Entrance Examination Board was influential in shaping the college entrance process in the United States. Its work helped to establish a standard for college entrance examinations, which was a major step forward in the standardization of higher education. The Board's legacy continues to this day, as the College Board, which administers the SAT and other college entrance exams.

In conclusion, the College Entrance Examination Board was a significant force in the development of higher education in the United States. Its work helped to establish a common standard for college entrance, which was essential for the growth and diversification of higher education. The Board's legacy continues to this day, as it plays a vital role in assessing and selecting students for college.
Secondary Education

Commission on the Reorganization of Education

and for the entrance examinations.

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The reports of the Committee of Ten and the CRESC focused on the development of a common academic curriculum and the prerequisites for college preparation, with a notable emphasis on the English language. The report advocated for a principle of equal educational opportunities and called for the development of a common academic curriculum that would ensure all students, regardless of background, had the same educational opportunities. The CRESC report was seen as a significant milestone in the evolution of educational standards and policies. It emphasized that educational standards should be set in a way that provided equal opportunities for all students. The report was widely discussed and influenced educational policies in many states, contributing to the establishment of common educational standards across the country.
The Scholastic Aptitude Test

The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is a standardized test widely used for college admissions in the United States. It is designed to measure a student's knowledge and skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. The SAT was developed by the College Board and is used by colleges and universities to evaluate applicants' readiness for academic work. The test is typically taken by high school seniors, although it can be taken at any time prior to college enrollment. The SAT is scored on a scale from 400 to 1600, with the three sections being scored separately: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (EBRW) and Mathematics. The essay portion is optional and scored separately. The SAT is widely considered to be a key component of the college admissions process, but it is not the only factor considered by admissions committees. Many colleges and universities have opted to reduce their reliance on standardized tests and have implemented alternative forms of assessment.
The use of standardized achievement testing during the war, coupled with the need for rapid training and other subjects, led the first World War to emphasize standardized achievement tests in spelling, arithmetic, and other subjects. However, standardized achievement tests were administered without considering how well the students learned. Therefore, the Tests of Educational Progress were introduced in the 1920s to measure the readiness of high school graduates for college. These tests were used to identify students who were ready for college. Other exams, such as the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), were introduced in the 1960s to measure students' readiness for college. These exams became an important tool for high schools and colleges to make decisions about admissions. In the 1990s, the College Board introduced the Advanced Placement (AP) exams, which provided students with the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. These exams were designed to help students prepare for college and were considered a valuable tool for making college admissions decisions. Overall, standardized achievement tests have been an important part of the college admissions process, and they continue to be used by high schools and colleges to evaluate students' readiness for college.
The POST-SPINHILL ERA

Despite the growth of schools, some districts still struggle with providing equal opportunities for all students. The POST-SPINHILL era underscored the importance of addressing these issues.

The POST-SPINHILL era was marked by initiatives aimed at improving educational equity. This period saw the implementation of new policies and programs designed to close the achievement gap and ensure that all students had access to high-quality education. Schools were encouraged to integrate students from diverse backgrounds, and efforts were made to provide equal resources and opportunities across different educational settings.

In the POST-SPINHILL era, the focus shifted towards inclusive education and the promotion of innovative teaching methods. This era also witnessed the rise of community involvement in the education process, with parents and community members playing a more active role in the decision-making process of schools.

The POST-SPINHILL era was characterized by a commitment to academic excellence and the belief that every student deserved the same opportunities to succeed. This era has laid the foundation for future educational reforms and continues to shape the landscape of education today.
A Notion of Risk

Education standards became a national issue in 1973, when the
College Board's annual report presented the fatal flaw of its scoring system. The
Notion of Risk focuses on how much of our children's educational future is
controlled by a single score. The notion of risk is not just a matter of how
high or low a score is, but of what it means for a student's future. The
report highlights the ways in which standardized testing has become a
powerful influence in the decision-making process for many students.

There is a pressing need to reconsider the role of standardized testing in
evaluating student achievement. The Notion of Risk argues that a
single score does not capture the full range of a student's abilities and
potential. It calls for a more comprehensive approach to assessing
student success, one that goes beyond traditional testing methods.

The report urges policymakers to consider alternative assessment
methods, such as project-based learning and formative evaluations,
which can provide a more nuanced understanding of student progress.

The Notion of Risk is a call to action for educators and policymakers
alike, to reexamine the role of standardized testing and to explore
innovative ways to support student success.
Achievement
Acknowledging the Need to Improve

47 percent of those who needed the programs the reforms promised, pursued advanced placement courses double the 1980s. College Board results show that, compared to only 21 million seniors in 1980, the number of students taking Advanced Placement courses doubled in the 1980s. The scores on the Advanced Placement exams increased, and the number of students earning scores of 5, a pass, increased. The scores on the National Merit Scholarship Program increased. The scores on the SAT increased.

In the decade that followed, the southern states saw gains. In the 1980s, several major studies appeared, but the blockbuster that rocked American education was in 1984.

The U.S. Department of Education, under Secretary of Education Carneal, released a report titled "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform." The report highlighted the need for educational reform, especially in mathematics and science, and called for higher standards and more rigorous testing.

In 1989, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching published "A Nation at Risk Revisited," which further emphasized the urgency of educational reform.

These reports, along with others, helped to galvanize the education community and led to the restructuring of schools and curricula across the country.
Moving Toward National Standards

The National Center for Education Statistics, in its report "Educational Statistics in the United States," has released data on the educational attainment of students. The report indicates that while progress has been made, there is still room for improvement.

In 2000, 4.5 million students graduated from high school, representing a 7% increase from 1995. However, the report also notes that the overall graduation rate for high school students is still only 80%, and there is a significant achievement gap between white and minority students.

The National Center for Education Statistics has identified several areas where improvement is needed:

1. Reading: In 2000, 40% of eighth-grade students were proficient in reading.
2. Math: In 2000, 35% of eighth-grade students were proficient in math.
3. Science: In 2000, 30% of eighth-grade students were proficient in science.

The report also highlights the need for more effective teaching strategies and the importance of teacher training.

Moving forward, it is essential to continue to focus on improving educational outcomes for all students.
The Evidence: A Review of Achievement

5. Every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and
career.

6. Every school in America will be free of drugs, violence, and
drug-related problems.

7. Minority students scoring in high school, college, and university when
reaching high standards.

8. No teacher, principal, or administrator would be "tenured" if their school
ranked below 10th in the nation.

9. The top 5% of high school graduates will go on to college, not including
minorities.

10. No school would be allowed to fail.

11. Schools would be required to publish annual reports on student
achievement.

12. The Federal government would be required to publish annual reports on
classroom achievement.

13. The Federal government would require all teachers to be certified
before being allowed to teach.

14. The Federal government would require all administrators to be
certified before being allowed to function in their positions.

15. The Federal government would require all school districts to be
self-sufficient and able to provide for all of their students.

16. The Federal government would require all schools to have a
minimum of 80% of their students passing the state
achievement test.

17. The Federal government would require all schools to have a
minimum of 80% of their students passing the national
achievement test.

18. The Federal government would require all schools to have a
minimum of 80% of their students passing the state
achievement test.

19. The Federal government would require all schools to have a
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