

in the suburbs every kid has access to these kinds of essential resources for learning.

GOVERNOR ROMER: I'm sorry Andy and Don. You really were helpful, but I've got to cut the time off.

Before we go to the next series of comments, I want to clarify that I am playing the role here of an average citizen who is trying to understand this issue, and that's what I am going to do the rest of the day. I am going to try to ask questions. I am coming at this with a typical American attitude, which is that schools in America are organized locally and we want local control, and that what is done closest to the student in the classroom is the best.

We have added on top of that a new conversation in the last couple of years. One, we believe in national goals. Two, we've got to reach certain kinds of standards to get to those goals. And when we talk about content and performance standards, we've gotten somewhat familiar with what those would look like.

But then we began to discuss opportunity-to-learn standards. I think one of the things we're trying to do is to describe them and really come to understand what they would be. And in the rest of your testimony, I would like it if you could help me and others know what would be the consequence of setting in motion the national process of formulating opportunity-to-learn standards. What would they look like? And second, how would they be used? Would they be used as a model in order to guide local efforts? Or, would they be used as an enforcement tool and as a precondition to receiving federal funds, which is part of what I think is contemplated by some who look at the Goals 2000 bill.

I am trying to reconcile these two strains of thought. Traditionally, we have said that although we want to arrive at national goals and national standards that can get us to those goals, we are going to let the way that we get there be developed district by district in order to have that pluralism and innovation in America. But now we are discussing the issue that there is too much inequity in that process and too much maldistribution of resources and opportunity.

To get at this issue, we need to talk about whether opportunity-to-learn standards should (a) have the right vision, or (b) have the right accountability? So the more specific we make this conversation, the more I think it will help us.

Let me turn now to our next testifier, Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

* MR. SHANKER: I think that there is nothing more important than dealing with issues of equity. I have worked in New York City schools and at many of the places where these questions of the fairness of raising standards and of putting in assessments that have high stakes attached to them are constantly raised.

I would like to say that I think that the emphasis at this time on opportunity-to-learn standards is unfortunate. Because we are making an assumption. And the assumption that we are making is that, somehow, if we don't put in stakes that are clearly visible to parents and teachers and students in the school, then we are letting the kids off the hook and there are no stakes. We talk as if we are the ones who are putting stakes in there and as if we would be very cruel if we have standards and assessments that have stakes attached to them unless we have taken care of a whole bunch of essentially equity issues.

The fact is that there are stakes in the world, not just stakes in school. The kids in Prescott Elementary School are going to go out into a world where they are going to be unprepared to do various things. That's true even if they should get into a college, because most of the colleges in the country do not have any standards. And it's true even if they should end up getting a degree, because the degree that these unprepared kids get will not be the same degree in

terms of content and what they're able to do in the world later on.

So we are sort of kidding ourselves into thinking that by not having standards and stakes in schools we are solving equity problems. We are not solving equity problems. As a matter of fact, to some extent, we are hiding them and we are burying them. We are not making them visible and important early enough.

So I would like to raise several issues. First, I think it is totally wrong to hold the development of content and performance standards and assessments and stakes hostage until we solve all of the equity issues, or even most of the equity issues, or even some of the equity issues. Totally wrong. And that's because this will guarantee that we never solve equity problems.

Second, I think that there is a necessary and important sequence in dealing with opportunity-to-learn standards. I was on President Bush's education advisory council. And a discussion came up one day about having a national test. I said at the time, "Well, this is going to take some time, because before you can have assessments you really need to know what the curriculum is going to be, you need to have some time for preparing teachers, developing materials, and for a whole bunch of other things." And one of the people on the committee said to me, "Oh, come on, Al. Three of us can walk you into the next room and develop a national test in fifteen minutes."

Well, I thought that was a pretty asinine thing to say. Tests should not come first. I think the sequence essentially is that we have to decide first what it is that kids should know and be able to do. Then we need an appropriate and connected assessment system. And then after that has been working for some time, there ought to be a process of research, of looking for and seeing in fact what differences there are in outcomes in different places and to what extent we find that these differences are a result of various factors. That is, there is a sequence. We cannot determine today, except through some philosophical process of beliefs, what is needed in terms of opportunity to learn. That would be unscientific. All we can do now is have general philosophies of equality.

I am sure that there are some things missing in some schools that would make a great deal of difference in student outcomes. There are other things that, if they are missing, will make less of a difference. We don't know that right now in terms of new content standards. And so the effort to develop opportunity-to-learn standards in advance of experience is likely to lead to a free for all, where everybody puts their own thinking on the table as to what it is that might cause student performance to increase or to decrease or to stand still. None of it would have very much basis.

Third, I would very strongly oppose the development of any kind of opportunity-to-learn standards that would become the basis of litigation that would shut down the education system. I oppose it because even if a system of standards and assessments and stakes results in some inequities, I think everybody will be better off. I think the greatest inequity that occurs right now is that some kids—the very kids opportunity-to-learn standards advocates say they want to help—are not getting the stuff in the first place. At least under this system they are more likely to get an education of value. I think it is very important to raise the question, "Can we wait to move ahead with new content standards and assessments until the whole world is absolutely fair?"

Are we going to create a set of opportunity-to-learn standards where some lawyer goes in and says, "Stop! Don't teach the kids algebra or don't have a new science curriculum because Prescott Elementary School doesn't have a laboratory. You cannot have a science curriculum until every school has laboratories and enough laboratories for every kid to be there." Is that what we want? I don't.

Do I want Prescott to have a laboratory, yesterday or twenty years ago? Sure. I sure do. But, will the country be better off if we stand still and don't have science curriculum and assessments until a laboratory is built in every place? I don't think so.

Now, I want to go to your three questions.

What aspects of teaching and learning should opportunity-to-learn standards apply to? I would say, as far as teaching, the curriculum. We should make sure that all kids are taught, and that we don't decide on the basis of individual teacher expectations or beliefs that some kids don't look like they can make it and therefore we're not going to give them much in the first place. That is, we act like gods in deciding and in lowering expectations, and whether it is out of racism or sympathy, it doesn't make any difference. The end result is the same: those kids will not have had an opportunity to learn.

Second, we must make sure that the textbooks and materials of instruction are the appropriate ones.

And I would say the third aspect has to do with teacher qualifications, both in terms of subject matter specialties, since that is a great lack in this country, and in terms of pedagogy.

As far as the learning side, I am very disturbed by the tendency to think of opportunity-to-learn standards in terms of promoting particular types of teaching. That is, we're going to say teachers must lecture; or if we don't have cooperative learning, that's no good; or if we don't have particular forms of student grouping, of tracking heterogenously or homogenously, that's no good. There's the idea that somehow from above we're going to mandate a series of processes and say, "If you don't organize a school in a certain way and do things in a given way, kids will not have the opportunity to learn." I think that would be a terrible mistake.

We need standards for student responsibility. Those have to do with discipline policy, with attendance—with a bunch of things—to show that there is the commitment on the part of students.

Now, what purposes should these opportunity-to-learn standards address? I would say ultimately they should be a form of political accountability for school districts and for states. They would be informational, which would indicate that school districts and states do or do not provide the following. To the extent to which you have stakes attached, you will have a great deal more political consequences.

For instance, right now you probably don't have Prescott Elementary School up in arms because the kids don't go to college, whether they're learning science or not. But once stakes are in there, a report that school districts or states in comparison with other school districts or states do or do not have certain provisions becomes part of the political process.

Again, one of the worst things that could happen is to say you're going to shut down the curriculum system or you're going to shut down the examination system until everything is set right. Basically, I am talking about a report to the people that allows people to say, "The reason our kids are not doing as well as they do in other places is because we are not doing thus and so."

Finally, how are opportunity-to-learn standards to be measured and implemented? I don't think you should measure them. I don't think you should try to make this more scientific than it can be. I think something closer to a wall chart in terms of what it is that states and districts provide rather than something that attempts to be a scientific measurement system would be far better.

GOVERNOR ROMER: Thank you, Al. Let me just ask one quick question.

Al, do you feel that if we say to a national body, "Draft some opportunity-to-learn standards," would you anticipate that they would deal with, for example, student-teacher ratios?

MR. SHANKER: I would hope not.

GOVERNOR ROMER: Would you feel that they should deal with per capita resources per student in order to get at equity of finance?

MR. SHANKER: I don't want to be misread. I am for good student-teacher ratios. And I am for lots more labs. I am for all of these things. The question is, do we hold up a system of standards and assessment on the basis that you cannot put that into place until everything else is the way we want it to be? And my answer is no I would not. Am I going to fight for all of those things? Do I believe that they are important? Yes, I do. Would I connect them to this and hold the rest of it hostage? The answer is no.

GOVERNOR ROMER: The third question I would ask, do you believe those standards would contain how many hours or days a year that you would be exposed as a student to the K-12 curriculum as a minimum standard for recommendation?

MR. SHANKER: No, because essentially if you are trying to deal with outcomes, you would be working at it at the wrong end. You may very well have schools and teachers and districts that are able to reach the same outcomes in much shorter periods of time. That would destroy the flexibility of teams of teachers or schools to use time in a more creative way than it is used today.

And I would hope that if you had standards and assessments, then they would provide substantial motivation for people to rethink some of the things that they do in school now that are mandated from above. But put it into opportunity-to-learn standards and you just recodify the same rigidities that exist now.

GOVERNOR ROMER: Now, I am trying to get specific for everybody in the room. You see, in Colorado, I know under our School Foundation Act, we have small districts that get \$8,800 per year because they are very, very small and others that get \$4,200 a year. I have forty districts out of 180 in the state that are on four-day school weeks. I don't think that is a good idea at all. I would like to outlaw it. But, you know, that is a decision that they make, not that the Governor makes.

I am just trying to get at what opportunity-to-learn standards look like. Would they deal with student-teacher ratios? Would they deal with some financial statements? Would they deal with how many numbers of days that teachers have contact with students? Would they deal with the qualifications of teachers based upon certification of subject matter? I am trying to get a feel for what it is that they might look like.

MR. SHANKER: Just take one of those things. There's no doubt that teacher quality is a very important issue here. Take mathematics and science. At the present time, the majority of teachers who teach math and science are not really math and science teachers, and they'd prefer to be teaching in their own areas. Right now there isn't anything you can do to change that. Those teachers, by the way, are not equally distributed across the country. There is no question that some districts have 100 percent of their slots filled with truly qualified teachers. There are other places that have zero people who are really qualified to do this.

Now, if you try to move those qualified teachers around through some sort of a compulsory system, you will lose those teachers. They have opportunities in the business world. You are not going to accomplish it that way. If you raise salaries, you're still going to have slots without really qualified teachers because we only produce a certain number of people who are competent in math and science. There's not enough to go around. I don't know of massive

unemployment in this field or that they're doing unimportant jobs.

The fact is, the only way that you're going to get that opportunity-to-learn standard met—namely, qualified math and science teachers—is to have standards and assessments and stakes and to get more people to be competent in this field, so that in one or two generations down the road you've got what Germany has, which is lots of unemployed mathematicians and scientists who can become teachers.

GOVERNOR ROMER: As many in the room know, I believe in the need for opportunity to learn very much. I believe in this. But I am trying to write an opportunity-to-learn standard. A standard can be, "All teachers of math shall be competent to teach math according to certain national standards." Or you can begin to say a great deal more detail. And I am trying to get at what it is that we really are talking about when we talk about opportunity-to-learn standards—how specific they are and whether you want to do that at the national level or the state level.

I need to move on to the next speaker and we will get some participation here. Next, Michael Webb, director of education and career development, National Urban League.

MR. WEBB: Thank you. Lately I have become a bit of a pyramid stalker, because one cannot stand before the great pyramids of Egypt without reflecting on the context in which these monumental structures were built. The question of context and meaning is of critical importance to the discussion of opportunity-to-learn standards.

Unfortunately, there are many citizens who have never set foot in an effective school. This includes students, teachers, parents, administrators, and others. There are many citizens who have only known run-down buildings, outdated texts, and crowded classrooms. There are many teachers who have not experienced professional development that left them empowered, reenergized, and retooled. There are many students who have never experienced what it is like to be enraptured in the joy of learning.

There are many of us who have become accustomed to inadequate buildings, programs, and instructional strategies. For many of us, the word "reform" is empty. It is devoid of meaning, much like the pyramids, without an understanding of meaning and context.

We stand before the monumental structures in awe but confused. The monumental structures of reform, the legislation, the rhetoric, the slogans—such as, "all children can learn"—impress but fail to inspire to point the way toward meaning.

Much of the reforms of the last twenty years have left many of us with an empty feeling. We see and we hear, but we do not know what it means or how it applies to us. We become frustrated and charged up to do battle without the benefit of weapons. Or we are simply ignored, or worse still, we become inured and resigned to a slow death.

The reform movement has focused to a great extent on outcomes. We who have been consigned by accident of birth to substandard schools have been told, "Patient, heal thyself." But the truth is, many of us do not know how to heal ourselves. Worse yet, many of us don't know what it would be like to enjoy good health.

I am here to offer my support for opportunity-to-learn standards. I see these standards as a way to demonstrate and to communicate what effective education is all about, much like the child who observes the finished model plane and uses the observation to construct a model plane. For many cases, opportunity-to-learn standards are needed to illustrate what effective schools should look like and how the many elements of facilities, teaching, learning, and assessment come together to create a rich learning environment.

The standards need not, and indeed should not, be static. There are notable