

**Remarks of CCSSO President Elizabeth Burmaster:  
*Charge to the Council on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership***

2006 Annual Policy Forum and Business Meeting  
Sunday, November 19, 2006

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Congratulations to Nancy Wilson, Rob Larson, and to our new slate of Executive Committee members. And, thank you, Val, for the great pleasure of working side by side with you this past year. I know we will continue to partner this year, and, that along with Rick Melmer and the CCSSO Board we all feel privileged to represent this organization. This past year, Val's leadership, determination, and steadfast attention to detail positioned CCSSO well and prepared for this moment and for all that is ahead.

And, as education leaders, we are ready.

Long before NCLB, individually, we have been working in our states to ensure a quality education for every child, dedicating our lives to the belief in public education as the foundation of our democracy.

We all know of Wayne Stansted's legacy. Sandy Garrett has been the Chief in Oklahoma for 16 years, with 35 years of service in education. Phyllis Usher has served as Deputy in Indiana for 15 years, and Roberta Stanley from Michigan has served 23 years as a Federal Liaison.

Our organization is the collective of years of experience, wisdom, and struggle of hundreds of individuals who have dedicated their lives to the children of America and every child's civil right to equity and opportunity in education.

As education leaders, we have long held the belief that the days of our children should be better than our own.

And, for us, that has always meant that it was our responsibility to ensure our young people were prepared for their future role in the family, society, workplace, and as citizens.

As education leaders, we have been at the heart of the struggle – for many of us, for nearly three decades or more – as the improvement of education has become a centerpiece of America's political agenda. From Johnson's War on Poverty to *A Nation at Risk* to NCLB, we have been at the very core of our country's economic, political, and moral struggle to live up to the American dream.

During this evolution, our public education system has been accused both of causing the ills of our society and looked to as our last, best chance as a civil society to save our collective soul as an American democracy: the only way to close the gaps in education and wealth and build a united society.

It has been a long, continuous struggle in the reform movement of public education. And, as education leaders, the ongoing, sustained effort and belief over time that our public education system has been and can continue to be transformed, reformed, redesigned, and continuously improved – that belief is central to our spirit and success.

And at this critical crossroads, we do believe that working in partnership we can create a public education system, which brings relevance to cognitive, social, and emotional learning so every child graduates prepared to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century interconnected world.

And, as education leaders, we know that in our larger society, we must insist on a collaborative community agenda that invests more in the growing numbers of children in poverty, reaches across the racial divide, and builds a politic that is based on lifting up all the children of this generation – not dividing them against each other, to paraphrase former President Bill Clinton. Then, and only then, will we truly realize the potential of a public education system that can preserve our American democracy and ensure justice and compassion in civic life.

This is who we are as education leaders. We are strong individually. We are strong as an organization. And, we have responded to the call for action.

In the coming year, as we come together as a united CCSSO, and assert our leadership in the state/federal partnership, we can empower our local school districts in the ongoing work of raising student achievement; closing the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers; and move beyond NCLB to ensure that every child graduates prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century global society.

For well over a decade, every state in the nation – indeed, every state in this room today – has focused on implementing standards, assessments, and accountability systems aimed at improving the achievement of all of our students to ensure that they are prepared and competitive in a global economy.

While we have made tremendous gains and our students are showing considerable progress, we know that our real challenge is to go beyond the basics; go beyond AYP and the mandates of NCLB; and go beyond where we have traditionally set the bar to a place that empowers all students with the creativity and skills necessary to function and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must provide students with the skills that are demanded in post-secondary learning environments or in the job markets of the global knowledge economy.

Our students will be competing with, and, most importantly will need to collaborate with, students from around the world. How we educate this generation will determine our nation's economic security and will define what it means to be an American in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As chiefs, and as an organization, it is our responsibility to lead this transformation necessary to implement 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in our classrooms.

**1. First, we must show high profile leadership at the state and national level to make the case for public education as the foundation for our American democracy.**

We need to educate leaders at all levels of the system to the importance of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for all of our children, not only for their future success, but for the common good of our communities, our states, our nation, and the world.

ESEA reauthorization must create urgency for innovation in teaching and learning and research and development in best practices and professional development.

We are prepared for a fast track as we work with Congress and our partners this year.

I will continue to chair our ESEA Reauthorization Task Force and, later today, we will work on our discrete issues agenda. We must lead the process of ESEA reauthorization.

It will take each of us, working with our own Federal Liaisons, our CCSSO Advocacy Team, and our own Congressional delegations, to tell the story and help build consensus.

**2. Because we must develop a broad national consensus and shared vision for what the future of education looks like.**

We need to collaborate with groups like Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, NSBA, NGA, NCSL, NASBE, NEA, and AFT to ensure that the skills of global awareness, financial and economic literacy, life skills, innovative and critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity — necessary in this increasingly connected and interdependent world — are as important as reading and math in our schools, and that a reauthorized ESEA must encourage and support, not inhibit state and local efforts to implement the next generation of standards-based reform. CCSSO work this past year reflects the commitment we have to ensuring an educational agenda, which prepares students for a 21<sup>st</sup> century increasingly diverse democracy and global society.

I want to thank Judy Jeffrey and Pat Wright for their leadership and the work of the Math/Science Task Force. The task force's work looks at an integrated approach. We must continue their important work, and take their recommendations to seize the opportunity to partner with major businesses around STEM initiatives.

Also, we will continue and enhance our collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution on a pilot program to train educators in the latest museum-based methods to enrich student learning and instruction.

Teachers from Delaware, Arkansas, and Wisconsin have piloted this project and, through the Internet and further training sessions, these teacher partners will train other educators, infusing cutting edge skills into front-line instructional practice.

This year, I ask for your involvement in advocating our Smithsonian project. And, Peter McWalters and the International Education Committee's work on our Global Education Policy Statement boldly calls for increasing rigor and raising the bar in our secondary school reform.

**3. Because this year we must get down to the hard work of implementation. This implementation agenda includes content, assessment, and professional development.**

We should lead and shape the discussion on tough issues like national standards.

If we are truly to lead teaching and learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then we must address the challenging issues. If we don't lead, then we will have no one to blame but ourselves when it is later "done to us."

We must face head on the controversial issues, calling upon the breadth and depth of experience and wisdom among our chiefs, deputies, federal liaisons, executive director, and CCSSO staff.

We must examine new assessments and determine how best to assess the full range of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

We need to look at ways that formative assessments facilitate best instructional practices and offer clear pictures of student achievement.

We should develop pilot projects that highlight new assessment models that focus on critical thinking, problem solving, and literacy skills.

This will not be easy, but CCSSO can lead this effort through our continuing work with the Formative Assessment SCASS, SCASS.21, and the Large Scale Assessment Conference. We have the brightest minds in the country associated with these efforts, and surely we can find new ways to assess learning in the future.

We must support new content, curriculum, and assessment with targeted and sustained professional development for our teachers.

We must issue the call for quality research and development to support 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning.

Each of us needs leadership training for administrators, principals, and teachers in data analysis, critical inquiry, collaboration, student-focused continuous improvement, and effective use of technology so that they can serve as role models for the use of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

We are all working to ensure that our professional development programs support integrating 21<sup>st</sup> century content and skills into the core curriculum.

CCSSO must support our ability to accomplish this and build capacity within our state agencies.

We should use CCSSO's already-existing networks of state leaders, working with administrators and teachers, such as SAELP and INTASC, to continue to explore new ways that professional development can be delivered to teachers.

And, we need to weigh in and lead on the national discussion on teacher effectiveness. CCSSO must be the preeminent voice that advocates for quality education for all children.

And all our action must be guided by member input. We are strong as an organization because of our membership.

That is why today I am announcing the formation of a task force that will give voice to chiefs, deputies, content experts, and partners to lead this organization on our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Agenda.

This task force will work to ensure that there is alignment among state interests, community interests, and business interests.

#### **4. Because we must engage all stakeholders to galvanize support for public education in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.**

We must seek out and showcase promising models of success already flourishing in our states. We should use these examples and build on their success.

We are the united, strong voice that can tell the story of why public education must be the best choice for all of America's children.

As an organization of state education leaders, we must collectively articulate the message of the moral and economic imperative of quality public education in the United States.

We can no longer tolerate students being educated in a system designed for a 19<sup>th</sup> century agrarian lifestyle, using 20<sup>th</sup> century curriculum, and then turning them loose in a 21<sup>st</sup> century digital world. The misalignment is too great and the stakes are too high.

At this moment in time, together as chief state school officers, with Gene Wilhoit as our Executive Director, we are poised like no one else to change the educational landscape of the future. The time is now. And, we are ready.