

A LETTER FROM THE COMMISSION COCHAIRS

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No matter how purposeful and well-grounded, the recommendations advanced by a commission seldom lead to meaningful differences in the lives of children, their schools, and their communities. There are no guarantees, of course, that this report will be any different than others that have been released with a flurry of hope and attention. Yet we hope this report will leave an indelible imprint on education philosophy and practice, for several reasons:

1. This report frames education within the most fundamental context—the personalized engagement and nurturing of the whole child.
2. It describes how the focus on one-size-fits-all education has marginalized the uniqueness of our children and eroded their capacity to learn in whole, healthy, creative, and connected ways.
3. It offers a new learning compact with our children—one that rightly puts the children and their learning needs within the center of every educational program and resource decision.

What's more, this report arrives at the peak of the debate over "standards-based education." Although there have been some gains in student achievement, the pace of progress is far too slow. Vast numbers of low-income and minority youngsters, in particular, continue to languish below grade level. We believe achievement will increase when the whole child is invited and able to learn.

This report provides the impetus for educators, policymakers, parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders to change the conversation about learning

and schooling from reforming its structures to transforming its conditions so that each child can develop his strengths and restore his unique capacities for intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual learning.

When we commit to educating whole children within the context of whole communities and whole schools, we commit to designing learning environments that weave together the threads that connect not only math, science, the arts, and humanities, but also mind, heart, body, and spirit—connections that tend to be fragmented in our current approach.

If the whole child were truly at the center of each educational decision, as ASCD Executive Director Gene Carter posits (see p. 4), we would create learning conditions that enable all children to develop all of their gifts and realize their fullest potential. We would enable children to reconnect to their communities and their own diverse learning resources, and we would deeply engage each child in learning. Finally, if the child were at the center, we would integrate all the ways children come to know the natural world, themselves, and one another, so that they can authentically take their place in creating a better future for all.

It is time that the United States begin a new conversation about K–12 education by asking, "What is possible now?" It is our conviction that given what we now know about learning and development, we can do better and we can do more. And when we can do more, then we *should* do more.