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Memo to Washington: 'Physician, Heal Thyself!'

By [Invited Contributor Listed Below](#) on April 17, 2014 12:07 AM | [No comments](#)

Today's guest contributor is **Theresa Rouse**, Superintendent, King City Union School District, California.

Education reform is a three-legged stool. All three legs of the stool must be addressed equally or the stool will be unstable. The three legs of the education reform stool include standards, assessment, and accountability. When education reform only addresses one or two of these legs, then the reform matches Einstein's definition of insanity, repeating the same thing over and over again and expecting something different to happen. In order to truly enact education reform, all three legs must be firm.

The **Common Core State Standards** and the next generation science standards aim for a level playing field across most of the nation and represent the first leg of the stool. Having a common language defining our educational goals across the nation has been long overdue and has provided a degree of controversy along the way. **Implementation challenges have been widespread** and are consistent with the lack of clarity related to the accountability leg of the stool. Teachers and school leaders have been reticent to implement the new standards fully while still living under the rules for accountability based upon former standards.

In California, state leaders took a stand to help educators move forward with the Common Core standards without the confusion of a dark cloud of accountability based on the former standards and assessment system. Schools are implementing the new assessment as a pilot test this spring, which allows schools to test the test and to test their infrastructure for online testing. In the spring of 2015, the online assessment will be operational and the baseline results will provide information needed to establish growth targets for student achievement.

The second leg of the education reform stool is assessment. The new national assessments tied to the Common Core are designed to provide a common benchmark to improve our understanding of student achievement across the nation. As the assessments are piloted this spring, **the national assessment consortia** will be able to determine next steps for the operational implementation in 2015. The development of the assessment related to the next generation science standards has yet to be determined.

The third leg of the education reform stool is accountability. This has turned out to be the most difficult and contentious area of all. Accountability should run in both directions--from schools to the public through their policymakers and from policymakers to schools. In this year of 2014, all students were expected to be proficient on state standards under the accountability provisions of No Child Left Behind (as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is known today). Even policymakers now **realize that ideal was far-fetched**. In its place, the Obama administration has administratively imposed standards, assessment and accountability provisions under Race to the Top. But teachers and administrators and **the national organizations representing them** are understandably wary of what appear to be potential consequences for teachers, schools, and districts tied to questionable value-added metrics.

Meanwhile the plain truth is that the policymakers in Washington demanding accountability from schools have failed to do their jobs. **The reauthorization of ESEA has been stalled for seven years**. We are left to make decisions and focus instruction as best we can at the local level without really knowing what policies to expect from the federal government. Listening to teachers and principals complain about the level of uncertainty surrounding our work, I often find myself looking east to the nation's capital with the old biblical adage in mind: "Physician, heal thyself!"

Theresa Rouse

King City Union School District, California.

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