

Nearly three decades ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released a report on the public education system that to this day, affects the policies that are created. *A Nation at Risk* pronounced, "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people." (US Department of Education, 1983) As a result national policies have been designed to raise the standards of public education around the Nation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, for example, strives to raise standards of schools, teachers and students, in effort to close the achievement gap among students. In an era of standards-based reform, the NCLB Act ensures that school systems require high academic standards, methods of monitoring growth, and in turn holds all parties accountable for those results. This often times leaves our Nation wondering, who should be held accountable for meeting such demanding standards and closing the achievement gap?

Teachers are often times analyzed and scrutinized first because teachers are required to teach our youth, no matter what their background or previous education may be. Without a doubt, teachers hold a great responsibility of preparing our youth to meet high academic standards, but often times, teachers are blamed for the failure of our schools. The concept of teacher accountability is to hold teachers to high success rates for students on standardized tests. In "Teacher Accountability: High Resolution, Not High Stakes," Ken Jones notes "the idea is to turn up the pressure so that those reluctant teachers will do what they're supposed to do and get results-results defined as high test scores." (Jones, 1998) But does this concept gain the support of teachers? Does it motivate them to work harder? No, because what must be recognized by society is that children come to a classroom with a great amount of preconceived notions about their past

knowledge, their current education and their future as a member of the community. Students are not like working with computers or robots or machines that rely entirely on human input to be productive. “Threatening teachers undermines the very risk-taking approach that we need from teachers in order to change instructional practices. Rewards and sanctions mostly serve to cause compliance rather than commitment.” (Jones, 1998) Rather than encouraging teachers to take chances, conduct action research within their classroom or experiment with the latest educational strategies, often times teachers are led to “teach to the test.” Education becomes more about test scores than preparing students for their future.

So rather than turning up the heat on teachers to “meet standards, or else,” society needs to work together to take educated risks. By educated risks, the entire educational community needs to be driven by the continuing education of teachers. It is necessary that professional development opportunities require teachers to learn and apply innovative lessons, and assessments that encourage teachers to analyze growth of students. Time must be provided for the collection and analysis of data among respected professionals, rather than as individual teachers working as separate entities. Although no single party is solely responsible for educating our youth, it is vital that, students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendants, Board of Education members, and the community join forces to attempt to raise the bar on the American education. Rather than attempting to motivate teachers to comply with the latest educational trends, the educational community needs to support teachers to commit themselves to the successful education of their youth, at the highest degree. Collaboration and support among all parties will unlock the incredible potential our youth has to meet high expectations.