"The Governors are ready to provide the leadership needed to get results on the hard issues that confront the better schools movement. We are ready to lead the second wave of reform in American public education."

 Lamar Alexander
 Governor of Tennessee
 Chairman, National Governors' Association

It's Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, a conversation among Governors with the rest of the world welcome to listen in.

It asks seven of the toughest questions that can be asked about education in the U.S.A., questions that must be answered if there are to be better schools. It sets up ways to keep up with what states do with the answers to these questions for the next five years, until 1991.

Better schools mean better jobs. Unless states face these questions, Americans won't keep our high standard of living. To meet stiff competition from workers in the rest of the world, we must educate ourselves and our children as we never have before.

- Why not pay teachers more for teaching well?
- What can be done to attract, train, and reward excellent school leaders?
- Why not let parents choose the schools their children attend?
- Aren't there ways to help poor children with weak preparation succeed in school?
- Why are expensive school buildings closed half the year when children are behind in their studies and many classrooms are overcrowded?
- Why shouldn't schools use the newest technologies for learning?
- How much are college students really learning?
At our Idaho meeting in August 1985, the Governors divided into seven task forces, one for each question. For the past twelve months, Governors have led hearings around the country. We have talked with hundreds of parents, students, decisionmakers, and scholars. More than a thousand people sent in written suggestions and testimony. Individuals and educational groups all participated.

You'll find a summary of each of the seven task force reports—written by its chairman—beginning on page 8. For more information, there is a detailed report from each task force to help Governors find what has or hasn't worked in each area. And for still more, separate volumes of supporting works are available for each task force.

The Governors' advice doesn't beat around the bush. Here are some of the recommendations that attracted my attention:

• Now is the time to work out a fair, affordable Career Ladder salary system that recognizes real differences in function, competence, and performance of teachers.
• States should create leadership programs for school leaders.
• Parents should have more choice in the public schools their children attend.
• The nation—and the states and school districts—need better report cards about results, about what students know and can do.
• School districts and schools that don't make the grade should be declared bankrupt, taken over by the state and reorganized.
• It makes no sense to keep closed half a year the school buildings in which America has invested a quarter of a trillion dollars while we are undereducated and overcrowded.
• States should work with four- and five-year-olds from poor families to help them get ready for school and to decrease the chances that they will drop out later.
• Better use of technologies through proper planning and training for use of videodiscs, computers, and robotics is an important way to give teachers more time to teach.
• States should insist that colleges assess what students actually learn while in college.

These are only some of the most important ideas.

Yes, there was. To sum it up: the Governors are ready for some old-fashioned horse-trading. We'll regulate less, if schools and school districts will produce better results.
The kind of horse-trading we’re talking about will change dramatically the way most American schools work. First, the Governors want to help establish clear goals and better report cards, ways to measure what students know and can do. Then, we’re ready to give up a lot of state regulatory control—even to fight for changes in the law to make that happen—if schools and school districts will be accountable for the results. We invite educators to show us where less regulation makes the most sense. These changes will require more rewards for success and consequences for failure for teachers, school leaders, schools, and school districts. It will mean giving parents more choice of the public schools their children attend as one way of assuring higher quality without heavy-handed state control.

We don’t want to be misunderstood here. We’re not ready to bargain away minimum standards that some states are just now setting. But we have learned that real excellence can’t be imposed from a distance. Governors don’t create excellent schools; communities—local school leaders, teachers, parents, and citizens—do.

Reading through the reports reminded me of the best advice of a famous Tennessean, guitarist Chet Atkins, who says: “In this life, you have to be mighty careful where you aim because you’re likely to get there.” Governors have confidence that if we can agree with schools and school districts on the right goals and give them enough authority to do what they need to do, then they can take American schools and their students where America wants them to go.

No. This report is for the sole purpose of helping Governors be better Governors. It is our best advice to each other. We have not tried to develop a consensus on every issue, as we do when we speak as an association to the President or to Congress. Each report reflects the views of the Governors who served on that task force. We hope it will be used to build the consensus that counts—in states, in school districts, and in individual school buildings.

Our report is different in these ways:

• The Governors themselves are doing it.
• We’re tackling seven tough issues that professional educators usually skirt.
• We’re setting up a way to keep up with results for five years.

Because without the Governors’ leadership, most of what needs to be done won’t get done.

Here’s what H. Ross Perot—who’s done a few difficult things in his life—had to say about his year-long fight to reform the Texas public schools: “It was the hardest, meanest, bloodiest thing I’ve ever been in.” Mr. Perot added: “People have been to see me about how to do what we’ve done in their states. I tell them, unless you can get the Governor involved, don’t even start. It will be a waste of your time.”

American public education has fallen into some deep ruts. Some of the changes that need to be made are so deep and will take so long that unless the Governors push, small changes will be labeled reforms and nothing much will happen except spending more money.

No one else can set the agenda in a state the way the Governor can. The Governor’s agenda becomes the state’s agenda and the state’s agenda is the nation’s agenda, especially on education, which is the responsibility of states.
The Governors have been helping, especially for the past four or five years. Almost any Governor will tell you that his or her state has "the finest new education reform program in America," most of them enacted since 1982. Most states have initiatives like the ones we have in Tennessee: Basic Skills First; Computer Skills Next; summer schools for gifted children in the sciences, the humanities, and international studies; more pay for outstanding teachers and school leaders; more language requirements; a longer school year; chairs and centers of excellence at the universities; and more help for adults who need basic skills, computer skills, and new job skills.

But before 1982, Governors were less involved. Most states had moved their top education officials away from the Governor's direct control. The federal government, the federal courts, and the teachers' unions increased their say about policy and management of public schools.

Still, state constitutions and laws establish the basic framework for how we operate our schools. So, we can change the way we attract and keep the best possible administrators and teachers. We can change the way our colleges educate our future principals and teachers, and the way we certify that they are ready to go into the classroom—and remain there—and we can change the way we assess their performance. We can find new ways to let parents be involved more in their children's education.

Jobs. More than anything, it is the threat to the jobs of the people who elect us.

The one thing that has brought it home to most of us is that we have been traveling. Mike Mansfield told me in June that Governors from forty-nine states have been to Japan since he has been Ambassador, some of them many times. What we see when we go are children who learn more languages and go to school more days than our children. In Korea we see people in one of the most literate nations working seven days a week for $3,000 a year. Even in the poorest parts of China, we find children studying English.

When Japanese plants come to our states, we have to set up Saturday schools because the Japanese want their children to learn more math than we teach during the week.

After we've seen that first hand, statistics and reports like these mean more to us:

- U.S. eighth graders' math skills rank ninth among twelve major industrialized countries of the world.
- It's not unusual for one-third of the college freshmen in the U.S. to read below a seventh grade level.
- Between 1971 and 1982, there was a net loss of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds' knowledge about and ability to use scientific principles. And there has been no improvement in advanced mathematical problem-solving ability.

In our jobs as Governors, we also see first-hand that high school dropouts are three times more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates.
And we see every day how huge changes in the structure of America, its families and population, make our crusade for better schools even harder. In 1985, just 7 percent of our households had a working father, a mother who stayed home, and two or more children. Of all the children born in 1983, 59 percent will live with one parent before reaching age 18. We are told that by the year 2000, approximately one-third of our population will be “minority.” Already more than half the students in many of the nation’s largest public schools are non-white, and this percentage is certain to increase.

What this means to us is that while competition overseas is getting stiffer, getting results at home is getting harder—and more urgent—because children from low-income, single-parent, and minority families are more likely to be poor, more likely to drop out of school and therefore, less likely to develop the strong skills needed to find and keep a good job.

Our report is named the Governors’ “1991 Report” because it looks ahead for five years, but it will take keeping better schools on the front burner for longer than that.

The Governors are in this for the long haul. This year we are giving schools more attention than we ever have in the 78-year history of our association. Our concern is bipartisan. The co-chairmen of this report are Bill Clinton of Arkansas, a Democrat who is vice chairman of both the National Governors’ Association and the Education Commission of the States this year and will be chairman of both next year, and Tom Kean of New Jersey, a Republican who is chairman of ECS this year. Governor Kean’s Task Force on Teaching has reminded us of some good common sense advice: “Follow through is everything.” Change is going to take commitment, hard work, and cooperation.

And we know it takes money. Education is the number one expense for every state. States now pay more than 50 percent of the total spending for public schools, and nearly one-third of the cost is in higher education. This past year, education spending in the states increased faster than ever. We have found raising new funds for better schools is easier than raising it for more of the same.

Absolutely not. That is another major thread that weaves through these reports. We know we need help. We can set the agenda, rally the troops, provide the leadership, but we must have help from professional educators to design the strategies and achieve the results.

Too many of us have spent too much time during the last few years battling with educators to secure real reforms. The battles were necessary. But they took time that could have been spent working with educators to develop even better strategies and even more support.

Governors want a new compact with professional educators in America so we can lead a coalition of everyone interested in better schools. We want to take the next steps together.

That is why we are joining with the Education Commission of the States and the Council of Chief State School Officers to devise a system to keep up with the results of this report on a yearly basis. That is why we have invited to our Hilton Head meeting leaders of the major professional associations and unions. We want them to know we are ready to lead . . . and to listen.
No. We won’t be giving grades. But we will report what is happening in each of the seven areas in each state. That should help set the nation’s agenda for what is important and successful—and unsuccessful—in making schools better. It is up to each state what each state does.

*The Governors are ready to provide the leadership needed to get results on the hard issues that confront the better schools movement. We are ready to lead the second wave of reform in American public education.*


Instead, this report is:

- Governor to Governor, tackling head-on seven of the toughest obstacles standing between Americans and better schools;
- Governors, offering to forge a powerful compact with educators that will change the way American schools work in order to get results; and
- Governors, preparing to lead a coalition to persuade citizens that better schools—created by the strategies in this report—mean better jobs.

*Lamar Alexander*
Governor of Tennessee
Chairman of The National Governors’ Association
August 1, 1986
TIME FOR RESULTS
THE GOVERNORS' 1991 REPORT ON EDUCATION

Governor Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Governors Bill Clinton and Thomas H. Kean
Co-Chairmen

National Governors’ Association
Center for Policy Research and Analysis
August 1986