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109

Measuring Creativity in California and the Nation

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Senator Curren Price of the California legislature wants an Advisory Committee on Creative and Innovative Education because, he says, the state schools aren't teaching kids to be creative.

The Conference Board and experts in the field say creativity is what the workplace will be demanding. California's proposed Senate Bill 789 establishing such a committee, similar to the one already signed by the Governor of Massachusetts, will develop an Index to measure and inspire creativity and innovation in our public schools. This is a must if we want to get America back on the right track competitively.

Last week, the Senate Education Committee heard and approved SB 789 authored by Senator Price. This legislation, introduced last February and approved by the Senate Committee on Education last week, is on a fast track.

If approved, it would require the Governor, Senate Committee on Rules, and Speaker of the Assembly to appoint 15 members who would be required to be experts in, or have experience in, the fields of education, public policy, artistic development, workforce development, or cultural development by April 1, 2012. By June 1, 2013, the drafting committee would submit a report to the Superintendent of Public Instruction on the factors to be considered as an Index on Creative and Innovative Education, and recommend the funding necessary to implement the index.

The committee of 15 members will have seven members appointed by the Governor, who shall reside in different geographic regions of the state, three members appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules, three members appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly plus the chairperson of the California Alliance for Arts Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Last April, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** said,

"The arts can no longer be treated as a frill...Arts education is essential to stimulating the creativity and innovation that will prove critical for young Americans competing in a global economy."

Duncan also said that the Education Department is conducting the first large-scale survey of school principals, music teachers, and visual arts specialists in ten years. However, Duncan and Obama cannot do it alone.

Depending how fast they move, California can learn a lot from Massachusetts. Although in many states, and in other places in the Federal government, we have heard talk about the importance of creativity in our schools to better prepare our kids for the creative age, few have actually tried to figure out how to teach creativity or how to measure it.

Clearly more needs to be done, and the Massachusetts and California legislation are important steps for any kind of Federal mandate. Big states like California and Massachusetts can lead the way; the task will not be easy but it is worth the effort.

Dr. Pasi Sahlberg, formerly with the European Training Institute, believes "schools do have a great potential to enhance human ecology by removing barriers and utilizing the potentials for more creative learning environments," but many of the barriers -- competition, standardization and test-based accountability -- "commonly prevent schools focusing more on developing students' creative knowledge, skills and habits of mind."

Collaboration, risk-taking and learning are general conditions of change, he believes. Further energy and resources needs to be invested to remove the barriers and to make the best out of the available opportunities.

According to *Newsweek Magazine*, E. Paul Torrance, a UGA professor emeritus of educational psychology (recently deceased), and known as the "Father of Creativity" came closest to developing tests to measure creativity. Although there are many scholars who have serious doubts

about testing individuals, there does seem agreement that it may be easier to concentrate on what is being called the "climate for creativity".

While offering no solutions, Laurie Schell and Joe Landon, of the [California Alliance for Arts Education](#) make it clear that a "creativity and innovation index would provide a way for schools to rate their progress in teaching, encouraging and fostering creativity in students, compile index scores...[and] quantify the opportunities in each school as measured by the availability of classes...that nurture creativity and innovation in students."

They continue:

"Because the (standardized) tests are the only public measure of school success and are attached to high stakes accountability measures' they have said, 'schools have an incentive to "teach to the test" and to ignore the broader spectrum of accountability measures that examine what it means to provide a complete education for the whole child. Those narrow test-related expectations fail to encompass the responsibility our public schools have to prepare students to meet the challenges and expectations of the workforce of the 21st century. As we have moved into an economy driven by ideas and innovation, our schools must respond by providing all our students with the opportunity to develop creative skills."

Schell and Landon put it bluntly: "As we seek to build a future where both the entertainment and technology industries continue to thrive in California, an essential component of that mission is our investment in the human capacity for imagination, creativity and innovation that drives those industries. To that end, an 'Index of Creative and Innovative Education' will demonstrate California's commitment to lead and to raise the bar in preparing its students to meet the needs of the industries that are so vital to the success of California's creative economy."