

LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE

Response to 1999 National Education Summit

Upon adopting the 1999 National Education Summit Action Statement, governors, education leaders, and business leaders agreed that each state would develop a response with specific targets and timelines for action. As a co-sponsor of the Summit and an alliance representing the major education organizations that are necessary partners to successful national and state efforts to improve student achievement, the Learning First Alliance offers its response to the Summit.

OVERVIEW

The 1999 National Education Summit was an important milestone in a decade-long effort in education improvement. A national movement for high academic expectations for all students was launched at the first National Education Summit in 1989, affirmed at the second Summit in 1996, and made an important step forward this past year. This most recent Summit included educators for the first time – representing a new partnership of educators, governors and business leaders.

Educators are the engine of change in implementing any significant improvements in teaching and learning. That is why the Learning First Alliance, a coalition of twelve major national education associations, has been working and will continue to work at the national and state levels to promote serious efforts towards the unprecedented agreements on improving student achievement identified at the 1999 Summit.

The Alliance represents a self-initiated commitment to develop and deliver a common message to all parts of the public education system, align priorities, share and disseminate success stories, encourage collaboration at every level, and work toward the continual and long-term improvement of public education based on solid research.

The Alliance is also putting in place specific efforts through which it can have the greatest impact in promoting the Summit's goals: strengthening effective professional practice, supporting research-based efforts to improve reading and math achievement, and promoting state alliances. The Alliance is actively communicating, mobilizing, and providing technical assistance to state level organizations and educators in pursuit of these objectives.

Alliance members represent more than ten million Americans engaged in providing, governing and improving public education. Its members are the:

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council of Chief State School Officers
Education Commission of the States
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Education Association
National Parent Teacher Association
National School Boards Association

Since its founding in 1997, the Alliance has focused on three major goals:

Ensure that high academic expectations are held for all students;
Ensure a safe and supportive place of learning for all students; and
Engage parents and other community members in helping students achieve high academic expectations.

LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE MAKING IT HAPPEN

The Learning First Alliance, through its members, has the organizational capacity in place to help implement the commitments of the Summit action statement. Most importantly, its members are represented at both the state and local levels and have created a supportive network so that these improvement recommendations can be communicated at all levels.

As part of Alliance efforts to rally the education community to implement the Summit action statement, Alliance member organizations have used their websites, journals, leadership meetings and other vehicles to strongly encourage their members to support the key strategies in the Summit statement. Moreover, they have urged their state affiliates to use the 1999 National Education Summit as a catalyst for improving student achievement within their states.

EDUCATORS AT THE SUMMIT

As a Summit co-sponsor, the Alliance worked in concert with Achieve to develop a consensus action statement that educators stand behind.

Alliance members not only participated in the Summit but also helped make it a truly national conversation by linking their websites to the Summit site, encouraging their constituencies to take part in the Summit downlink locations, and facilitating the virtual conversations that took place between educators and the public from coast to coast.

ALLIANCE ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF SUMMIT COMMITMENTS

Strengthening Effective Professional Practice

Summit participants recognized that we cannot expect students to meet rigorous academic standards unless we have teachers equipped to teach to higher standards. Meeting this challenge requires schools, districts and states to focus intensely on student achievement and what each educator needs to know and be able to do to help each student improve. This focus should be the core of effective practice in the education profession.

The Learning First Alliance is working to develop a research-based consensus on the characteristics that constitute effective professional practice, case studies of schools and districts that exhibit these characteristics, and recommendations for action that address the roles and responsibilities of its members, including teachers, principals, parents, and school district and state policy makers and staff. The Alliance's work will provide a framework for its members to reach consensus on recommendations around key elements of the Summit statement. Recommendations will address how to target professional development resources on programs that give teachers the content

FOLLOWING THE SUMMIT, LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS SHARED A JOINT MESSAGE WITH THEIR MEMBERS:

“Today there is unprecedented consensus on the steps necessary to improve American education. The leaders of the Learning First Alliance saw this first hand last month when the nation’s governors, business and education leaders met at the third National Education Summit. Summit participants reinforced the messages of earlier national meetings by reaffirming their commitment to rigorous academic standards that ask students to learn more so they are prepared for success in the society of tomorrow.

But, new at this Summit was the recognition that ensuring all students achieve these high standards will require intensive efforts to improve teacher quality, provide all students a fair opportunity to meet higher standards, and have fair accountability for results. Furthermore, there was agreement that governors, business and education leaders will have to work hard in harmony to make this happen....

At the Summit, educators were represented primarily through the Learning First Alliance, a co-sponsor of the event. As a result of the common ground among education leaders, largely developed through two and a half years of collaboration in the Alliance coalition, educators were able to make particular commitments where they will take the lead....

This nation has seen many Summits and conferences that hit the front pages for a day and then faded from sight. That cannot be the result for this Summit. The commitments made reflect the best of what we have learned about improving student achievement. The task is to put them into action in every state, district and school.

We, as educators, must challenge all states to take this opportunity to accelerate the pace of improvement.”

knowledge and skills to teach to higher standards and school leaders the skills to improve instruction and manage organizational change, how to create an environment and schedule that support teacher and student learning, and how to put in place incentives for effective professional development and career growth.

Reading and Mathematics

At the very heart of raising overall student achievement is ensuring that all students master the basics: reading independently by the end of 3rd grade and being proficient in the fundamentals of algebra and geometry by the end of 9th grade. The Alliance is focused on research-based strategies for improving performance in elementary reading and middle-grades mathematics, and has developed action plans in both reading and mathematics. These plans are being used in states and districts around the nation to inform their reform efforts. We will continue to develop and disseminate these recommendations to educators, policymakers, and parents as well as other research-based tools to achieve these goals. In particular, the Alliance is developing a set of criteria for judging effective reading professional development for elementary school teachers.

Support for State Learning First Alliances

Fostering state-level alliances is a primary vehicle for implementing our national consensus on our core goals and the consensus reached at the Summit. Already, several states have been encouraged by our example to develop state alliances that reflect our membership at the national level and that focus on core issues in improving student achievement. For example, in the past year the Kansas alliance has created a powerful, unified consensus voice on reading and professional development based on our reading action plan. They have issued position papers, held a state Summit on reading, distributed the Alliance's reading action plan to every elementary school teacher in the state, organized trainings on reading instruction, developed legislation to support effective reading programs in low-performing schools, and pushed for research-based professional development. The Alliance is now preparing to pilot partnerships with at least four to six state alliances over the next two years.

Similar to the consensus states are reaching on reading and math through the Learning First Alliance's publications on these subjects, these new and existing partnerships to forge coordinated state efforts to help all students achieve high standards, ensure quality teachers and strengthen accountability.

**LEARNING FIRST ALLIANCE
MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS
ENCOURAGED THEIR STATE LEADERS
TO PROMOTE
THE SUMMIT AGENDA:**

. . . We believe that state follow up to this third National Education Summit provides a critical opportunity to bring together three essential elements in a state – educators, the business community, and the executive branch – around a national consensus agenda that reflects the best of what we have learned about improving student achievement. Educators can lead in this arena by approaching the Summit participants in their state and promoting active and aggressive strategies to implement the Summit commitments, including the development of real – not paper – state plans. . . . Educators can also lead by presenting a united approach to improving student achievement. . . .