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Dolan Presentation

The role of public education is changing. It used to be the role of public education to do the following:

- Create citizens in a democracy
- Ensure social justice and equity
- Develop the child
- Academic Achievement

The first, creating citizens, was historically our primary focus. However, fewer people now want us focusing on this, regardless of their political affiliation. The second, social justice, is a moral enterprise, and it is where we as an association spend most of our time. We do this in conjunction with the third, developing the child.

Over the past 8-10 years, the focus has shifted more and more toward academic achievement being the primary perceived purpose of public education. This is came about from federal policy as the nation shifted to very narrow discussion about achievement in the wake of NCLB. This shift occurred without any dialogue or debate. The shift in focus happened essentially overnight, and it was met with a shift in policy, time, funding, and resources. Since NCLB, the focus has narrowed even more.

This shift in focus has resulted in a shift in the structure of public education. The historical structure of public education has been one in which the local district determines policy which is then played out at the school site. This is where we built ourselves, but it's all changing. Local control is historical and going away. NCLB added other structures to the mix, namely that policy would also be determined at the state and nationally level.

Although different states reacted differently to this, NCLB has brought on significant changes. Most public education entities now use the language of NCLB; areas that have had local or even site control have lost that ability to design policy; and in two and a half years, nearly every state has moved away from the historical structure (local control) to one of more federal control - as seen by the adoption of the national core standards.

RTT affected the structure yet again, one in which the federal level now has a greater influence not only at the school level, but even at the classroom level. We are continuing to move rapidly to a high/low model, where decision making is focused on federal control demonstrated at the classroom level. Furthermore, technology is now an ever evolving fixture in public education, which we cannot afford to let get passed us. As for our old system, as an association, we have built a lean-to against an antiquated and dying structure.

Yet we now have the opportunity to define our profession; to reframe it. IBM misses the shift in technology; Sears misses the shift in merchandising. Why? Because they are the best, and they are in love with their past at the expense of looking to the future. For the teacher who says "I'm tired of having others tell me to keep up or change. I just want to shut my door and teach!" - imagine this: What if your doctor said "I'm tired of having others tell me to use new technologies, new medicines, and new procedures. I just want to shut my door and practice medicine"? The NEA cannot afford to miss the shift in public education. We have an obligation to move forward.