

Reflections on the 1994 ECS National Education Forum: The Future of Education Policy - An Asian-Pacific/North American Dialogue

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The 1994 National Forum and Annual Meeting of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) was held in Honolulu in early July. What I appreciated the most is that this 25th annual meeting embodied a significant international summit for two days, focusing on the Future of Education Policy: An Asian-Pacific/North American Dialogue. Top education officials from the United States, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan (Republic of China) met in Hawaii on July 6-7 for the first time to discuss their approaches to solving difficult education issues. And in the meantime, they shared common interest in education reform to cope with the challenge of the 21st century.

The summit was intended as a meeting ground for the national education officials to explore the various ways their nations are dealing with different issues of education policy.

The most significant part of this educational summit as I perceived it, is that the U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley led a delegation of fifteen members to attend this meeting which was quite similar to the 1992 APEC EDUCATION MINISTERIAL held in Washington, D.C. What has characterized the 1994 Hawaii education summit is that Secretary Richard Riley was accompanied by two of his competent assistant secretaries (David Longanecker and Thomas Payzant) to help tackle many timely issues that we are all concerned. Joined by three governors (Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin, Jim Edgar of Illinois, and John Waihee of Hawaii) as well as nine other leading educators, Secretary Riley expressed hope that the discussion would go beyond a polite round table. American delegates said they were particularly eager to learn more about school-to-work initiatives that other nations are experimenting with. "Every country is saying that its future depends on the capacity of its people to be educated," said Frank Newman, President of ECS. And I agree with Newman completely. As a matter of fact, education reform is a global issue that all of us have to tackle seriously. In Taiwan, a similar national education conference was concluded right before the ECS forum in Hawaii. The consensus on assessment, educational

standards, accreditation as well as teacher training that the United States and the Republic of China on Taiwan share is rather significant in relation to the Hawaii education summit.

Many ECS discussions were focused on assessment of higher education programs and student learning, the status of higher education resulting from an international study, and education reform in the preparation of teachers and administrators.

What turned out to be the most exciting is that Secretary Riley unveiled the (US Education) Goals 2000 which turned out to be compatible with the goals of many Asian nations. In addition, the currently debated traditional value, family value and internationalization of education through promotion of foreign languages, other issues related to educational cooperation of different levels have been discussed. Besides, Secretary Riley was fully aware that the economy of the world is changing in very dramatic ways in relation to education and foreign language learning in the global village. I share with his idea that global village, East-West dialogue, and multiculturalism suggest that a new outlook is taking shape as to how we see ourselves in the world.

During the two-day education summit, Secretary Riley has demonstrated his charisma by enthusiastically sharing ideas with education officials from all the twelve nations. It has been envisioned that the summit sponsored by ECS and the U.S. Department of Education will serve as catalyst to ensure future education cooperation between the United States and its Asian Pacific neighbors. The experiences being practiced in Taiwan (ROC), Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and many other nations will certainly serve the best interest of this country. This is particularly so when we are promoting traditional value and desirable educational achievement. Together, let us envision a bright future of the 21st century through educational cooperation in this global village.

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