

***'Tough Choices' Education Coalition Grows with Three Additional States  
Pledged to Reinvent Their Education Systems  
Six States Now Committed to Rigorous Reform Agenda***

Washington, D.C.—Responding to an unprecedented global economic slowdown, top officials in three more states announced their commitment to the “*Tough Choices or Tough Times*” reform agenda, a major redesign of state education systems intended to help students succeed both in school and the workforce.

Late last year **Massachusetts, New Hampshire** and **Utah** became the initial states to announce their commitment to implementing recommendations of the *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce* ([www.skillscommission.org](http://www.skillscommission.org)) in its “*Tough Choices or Tough Times*” report. Today, three other states, **Arizona, Delaware** and **New Mexico**, announced that they, too, have signed on to this aggressive agenda for education reform.

The Commission proposes a practical approach to dramatically improving the performance of the nation’s students by adopting the kinds of powerful instructional systems, based on the highest international standards, that the most successful countries have used for many years. Additional recommendations include: recruiting our teachers from the top third of college graduates and increasing their pay to make that possible; revamping the high school-college transition; reallocating education funding to high priority strategies for improving system performance; pre-k for all; putting more of our education funding behind students from low-income families; and changing the way schools are managed to give teachers much more influence over the way schools are run, while holding them accountable for the results.

“Forty years ago, the United States had the best educated workforce in the world. That has not been true since then, and our standing relative to our competitors continues to decline. Nothing, not even the current economic crisis, has a more important bearing on the standard of living that our grandchildren will be likely to enjoy as adults. With these additional states, the momentum behind this effort continues to grow, providing us with further momentum, and we are talking with other states that are also very interested in joining,” says Marc Tucker, Co-Chair of Implementation, *New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*.

“Education is the most critical investment a society can make in its future. We are ready to work with NCEE over the next year to help ensure that we get the greatest return for that investment,” said Delaware Gov. Jack Markell. “No single person has all the answers to the critical questions facing our education future. By joining this consortium we will gain greater access to outside experts committed to making the most of public education. We can leverage what has worked around the country to make the most of our own reforms.”

“The bold education initiatives we’ve enacted in New Mexico over the last six years are taking root, but we can’t afford to stop seeking out new ideas when it comes to ensuring our students get the best education possible,” Governor Bill Richardson says. “The innovative initiatives in *'Tough Choices'* are worth exploring as we develop an educational system that prepares our children for the evolving demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.”

*“Tough Choices or Tough Times,”* which was the focus of a 2006 *TIME* magazine cover story, incorporates many features of the world’s most successful education systems. Each state is zeroing in on the part of the agenda that best fits its needs right now.

Arizona’s commitment to *“Tough Choices”* is grounded in its history of innovation in education, including its pioneering charter school laws and P–20 approach to meeting the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace.

“I support *‘Tough Choices or Tough Times’* because its goals align with a number of our initiatives and accomplishments,” says Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne.

Examples that Horne cited include: Alignment of high school math and science graduation requirements with university admission requirements; strengthening of career and technical education (CTE) academic content; initiation of Education and Career Action Plans to support student academic and career goals; and alignment of Arizona’s high school graduation rate to the National Governors Association recommendation.

New Mexico, under the leadership of Gov. Bill Richardson, has already enacted bold education reform that mirrors the key initiatives of *“Tough Choices”* including: expanding pre-k education; increasing teacher pay; and improving the high school to college transition. Over the next year, the Public Education Department will explore how the other recommendations of *“Tough Choices”* fit into New Mexico’s educational system’s needs.

Delaware is implementing *“Tough Choices”* via the Governor’s plan to give school districts more flexibility to innovate, offer teachers additional rewards for excellence and introduce greater accountability through more rigorous and more frequent testing.

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