

*A fanciful excerpt of the President's State of the Union Address, January 2014 (...what he could have said):*

**The New Game-Plan**  
*Freedom, Opportunity, and the Future*

By Brian Cory

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...Let me turn to the future of this nation, education.

Many well-intended efforts have been exhausted to move the ball forward in our schools. As President and as a parent like so many of you, I am not satisfied with where the ball is right now.

Past game-plans to advance education in this nation have been similar for far too long. And, not surprisingly, the results have also been similar.

To move the ball forward, I am announcing a new game-plan for education this evening.

If one word could be used to define past game-plans, it would be *achievement*. The new game-plan will be defined by one word: *innovation*.

In order to move forward we will transition from the No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top models. These models, ambitious and noble in their design, taught us many lessons in implementation. We must employ the lessons learned. In addition, we will move the Common Core State Standards Initiative in a different direction for as the direction moves, so moves the ball. The work engaged to develop the standards will not be in vain. However, our country urgently demands more than the standardization which has become synonymous with the standards.

The new game-plan will be fueled by some immediate actions.

For starters, the new game-plan will call for a moratorium on all standards-based standardized tests. This action alone will be an immediate game-changer. Of all of the lessons learned from years of exhaustive efforts aimed at moving the ball forward, one of the more prominent lessons is that there are more effective ways to assess our students than through standardized tests. The new game-plan will require new efforts be exhausted in the area of assessment to move our schools, educators, and students forward. I encourage the States and our educators to design new innovative ways to assess their students, including the use of learner portfolios, which reflect the Common Core Standards in-action.

Just as critical as changing how we assess is changing what we assess. And this does not apply solely to assessing students. The new game-plan will also assess schools and educators in new ways. From here

forward, our schools, educators, and students will be measured by the bar of innovation. We will be the first education system in the world to deliberately define schooling and success in this manner. Innovation is the new achievement. From here forward, innovation will serve as our compass for teaching, learning, and assessment. Innovation will be the measure by which we will assess our schools and education system.

As the new game-plan is implemented, we will not try to emulate our friends in Singapore, Finland, or South Korea. Now is not a time to replicate. Now is a time to create. Now is a time to lead. Under the new game-plan, our schools will break free from the chains of achievement and dance in the freedom of innovation. Beginning tomorrow, when the first bell rings at schools across this country, I encourage our educators and students to exercise this freedom. In doing so, you will move the ball forward.

The state of Texas should be applauded for this year's elimination of its mandate for students to take Algebra II. However, let me be clear, my commendation of this move has little to do with Algebra II. My commendation has more to do with The Lone Star State's audacity to support students' futures by envisioning new requirements and new pathways. Algebra II may or may not be the problem. Algebra II may or may not be the solution. Tonight I simply challenge the States and our educators to assess their promotion requirements, through the lens of innovation, to begin identifying problems and – more importantly – flesh out possible solutions. One thing is certain: new-world demands will not be sufficiently met with old-world requirements. I challenge all states, including Texas, to design an education for students with graduate opportunities in mind rather than minimum requirements for graduates. Opportunities, not the fulfillment of requirements, will define our future.

Our nation is a diverse nation and hence our schools should offer pathways as diverse as our students. The new game-plan will call for the creation of pathways to honor our nation's students as well as our vast array of future needs. Educators will be empowered to create authentic, innovative programs to nurture students' strengths and passions. In my humble opinion, changing the learning options for students is even more critical than changing how and what we assess.

Our nation, like many others around the world, has been tirelessly engaged in closing the Achievement Gap. Under the new game-plan, we will shift our focus to closing the Opportunity Gap. Opportunity – for our nation and for individuals – will move the ball forward. And make no mistake, opportunity in the future – in the United States and around the world – will stem from innovation. The new game-plan will call for opportunity for all, not opportunity for some. A tenet of the new game-plan will be that opportunity starts in individual classrooms in individual schools in individual communities and begins with innovation. Innovation drives opportunity.

Many educators have embraced the practice of the flipped classroom. The new game-plan will call for the flipped school. Schools, for far too long, have reflected the communities which they serve. Schools must now be used in new ways to build communities. In addition to serving as hubs of curriculum, the new game-plan will provide resources for schools to serve as hubs for the delivery of primary-needs' services such as health and dental care, mental health services, family counseling, child care, and career training. We know that the ball will not be able to be advanced forward in the continued absence of

these essential services in some of our neighborhoods. As schools flip, the new game-plan will foster new partnerships between schools and community services, businesses, and government. We will be closer to our goal when communities reflect the schools which serve them as opposed to schools reflecting the communities which they serve.

Our goal is innovation.

Innovation is freedom. Innovation is opportunity. Innovation is our future. Innovation is the new game-plan for education.