

Let High Standards Drive Creativity and Innovation



ISSUE ORIENTED

By Anita McAnear

Anita McAnear is L&L's acquisitions editor and national program chair for NECC. A former middle school math and language arts teacher, McAnear has been with ISTE since 1983.

Thomas L. Friedman's book, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—and How It Can Renew America*, is an interesting look at the problem of global warming and what we can do about it. Among a number of his ideas and theories that resonated with me was his discussion of how standards and regulations can drive innovation. His examples were federal government standards for the automotive industry and other industries related to using or producing energy. Companies complain about government-imposed standards, but in every case they meet them through their own innovation, usually before the deadline, and are more competitive as a result, which gives them a business advantage. It creates a positive cycle of creativity, innovation, and growth.

It did make me think about how educational standards should also be driving innovation and creativity among educators and students. The advantage in business is that it is usually very clear when standards have been met. Education, however, gets caught in the vicious cycle of setting standards that can be measured by standardized tests but that aren't high enough to really prepare students for their futures.

If you look at all the curriculum-area, technology, informational-literacy, and 21st-century standards, you realize that it would be very difficult for students to meet these benchmarks and not have the basic skills that we test them for so often. These standards and the similar teacher and administrator standards should be the bars

set for students and educators. With the help of the professional organizations that developed the standards, educators should devise the proof that they have met them. If students meet standards according to the proof devised, but it doesn't seem adequate to parents and the designated agencies, then they need better proof the next year. They could look at what other schools are doing.

What is clear is that the educational system will not improve with educators working in isolation. It will take creative teams of teachers working together to improve their practice and learning for students. Administrators should organize teachers for this purpose and provide needed staff development and support as well as feedback on methods for proving that standards are being met. Technology coordinators need to provide an infrastructure along with support and maintenance to help teachers take advantage of all the tools and resources available. Teachers and technology facilitators must work with colleagues locally and globally to set high standards for their students, and they should organize to take advantage of all the online tools and resources at their disposal to meet the learning needs of all students.

This process almost guarantees that the creativity and innovation standards in the new ISTE NETS would be met, as educators would need to be really innovative and creative to meet the standards and prove that they have done so. As they pass on those high standards to their students, they will also ensure the development of their creativity and innovation skills.