Launching an Independent Nonprofit to Support Improvements in Instructional Materials

OVERVIEW
Conceived by some of the nation’s leading minds in math, science, business, K-12 and higher education, a new independent nonprofit designed to improve K-12 education in the United States will launch in 2014. Because mathematics is the gatekeeper to later success in life, and because all American teachers and students should have access to learning materials of the highest quality, this nonprofit organization will begin by publishing reviews of K-12 mathematics curricular materials, beginning with analysis of their alignment to the mathematics Common Core State Standards, and expanding over time to include teacher feedback and measures of efficacy. The effort will be led by Harvey Mudd College President Dr. Maria Klawe, and will progress to include reviews of English Language Arts instructional materials, as well.

WHY START WITH MATH?
We are sending higher numbers of young people to college than ever before, yet graduating fewer—and mathematics skill is often what holds young people back. By every global measure, K-12 students in the United States lag in mathematics behind students around the world. Large achievement gaps among socioeconomic and ethnic subgroups persist. And despite many valiant efforts, long-term trends show only modest improvement. Mathematics proficiency matters greatly: It opens the door to high school graduation, college readiness, college graduation and the jobs of today and the future. The stakes are tremendous for vast improvement in mathematics understanding for all American students.

WHY NOW?
This moment in history is a pioneering phase in education ripe with possibility. There is a convergence of three decades of accumulated knowledge around mathematics learning. We know what works. There are also examples of technology making meaningful contributions to mathematics teaching and learning. The market increasingly will be swamped with new and repackaged math products over the next few years. Without reliable information, American school districts will make uninformed purchasing decisions and the needle on student performance will remain unmoved.

The new organization will become a trusted source to collect comparable, reliable data on which coursework and units (not apps or games) match up to the standards of rigor, coherence and focus established in the Common Core State Standards. This information will then be disseminated to those charged with purchasing materials for schools, districts and states. Teachers and parents will also have access to the information.

This new organization will gain traction and experience in evaluating alignment to these standards during its start-up phase, and will then later add teacher feedback on which materials most nimbly and deeply support teaching and learning, and which factors seem most influential in improving student learning.

The time for this new entity is ripe because:
→ Many have called for such an entity, but no such independent, trusted resource exists.
→ We know what works in mathematics teaching and learning.
→ The Common Core State Standards, now in 40-plus states, represent a tremendous step toward higher expectations and increased achievement across the U.S.
→ Many existing and emergent examples of technology indicate promise as tools for potential great leaps in mathematics teaching and student performance. These digital materials are proliferating rapidly at the same time that tremendous gaps exist in student and school-based capacity to access interactive digital materials.
IMPACT
The goal of this initiative is to become an independent, trusted organization that will produce compelling evidence about what constitutes quality K-12 materials. Over time, these evaluations will demonstrate their value to those charged with spending taxpayer resources on instructional materials. They will inform purchasing, teacher and student use, and continuous improvement of materials design going forward. Over time, teachers and students will have the highest quality learning materials because demand for them will improve. Ultimately, the use of these materials will contribute to increased academic achievement by American students.

MOVING FORWARD
This spring, Harvey Mudd College President Maria Klawe and her Board of Directors will:

→ Recruit a world-class founding board of directors who represent a diverse cross-section of accomplished and courageous leaders who are committed to education excellence;

→ Hire an experienced and entrepreneurial Executive Director who will lead the organization from kickoff to successful implementation;

→ Engage with the organization’s key audiences—state education departments and school districts that identify and purchase instructional materials—to shape the nonprofit’s output;

→ Invite the brightest minds in education—especially expert teachers and curriculum experts—to conduct first evaluations of quality alignment.

SUPPORTERS
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