

THE CONSTRUCT OF STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

Liza Herzog, Director, Academic Research and Assessment, Charles D. Close School of Entrepreneurship and Affiliated Faculty, School of Education, Drexel University, and
Cashmear Moore, Cheltenham High School Class of 2021

As we began to examine the construct of standards-based education, we couldn't help but return to the title of this issue, 'New Tools for a New House.' It challenges the very idea of whether standards really act as *tools* for all students, and whether education can be conceived of as a *house*.

From "to hide," *house* denotes shelter and refuge, alternately used to mean to run from, to shield, cover, and to protect. House is also 'of that thing'... that thing being government, or publishing, astrology, even an audience (a full house). The idea of a schoolhouse, a long-ago feature of English schools and a concept brought to the US (the specter of which hovers as our temporary 'homeschool imperative'... a schoolhouse places focus on unity and loyalty for a part among a larger system or structure, all buoyed by the social, emotional and spiritual care for students.

This was the promise we ushered in with 'schoolhouse', now lost, yet arguably with the option to regain. Those structures, or houses, we build around ourselves serve a dual function-- they keep danger out while keeping community in. This idea of house as school and vice versa does not equate for so many of our students, in that sense of community that somehow is relying on standards to build the foundation.

Returning again to the title: tools for a new house. *A tool* equips or prepares you to do something. The idea that all students should know and be able to do certain things at particular moments along their educational journey is code for curriculum, instruction, and assessment too often designed by a small majority, predicating the advancement through these systems around a 'typical' student's demonstrations of understanding and/or of the uptake of proscribed knowledge and skills.

What we call educational systems—created in, by and through states, Districts, schools and classrooms—have seeded pathways as lockstep progression through school, grade level by grade level, course by course, benchmark by benchmark, standard by standard and not only have these tools not served all students but rather have failed to support great numbers, especially Black, Latinx and Indigenous students.

Unpack a standard and you lay bare an agenda, or curriculum, tied to a set of outcomes derivative of being proficient in that thing, that practice or process or habit of mind that someone somewhere has deemed valuable. Queue COVID, which makes possible a chance to recast 'new tools for a new house' as 'new ideas for new ways of thinking and learning.' Using this frame, curricular and instructional ideas could be far less standards-based than standards-referenced, striking that balance of wonder and rigor, richness and renewal.

More than-- and different, really-- from tools, 'new ideas for new ways of thinking and learning' become high-interest, high-touch aspirations in the way that Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) rewrote standards as core ideas, concepts and practices. Then, rather than producing evidence or confirmation of students having gained something essential for 'success', these ideas become the through-line for recognizing and engaging new ways of thinking and learning. This is what COVID and its vastly disparate impact lays bare in its entrepreneurially elegant encapsulation of what it means to 'think forward' with justice and peace.

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