A FEW decades ago, leaders in the field of school reform introduced the concept of "effective schools" as a way to identify what works best in educating children and to provide models for struggling schools to use for improvement. The effective schools movement is frequently attributed to the work of the late Ronald Edmonds In a speech delivered to the National Confer ence of the Teacher Corps in 1978, Ed monds defined the five characteristics consistently evident in effective schools. strong leadership, clear emphasis on learning, positive school climate, regular and appropriate monitoring of student progress, and high expectations for stu- dents and staff. From these straightfor ward principles, an entire belief system has evolved that offers a variety of solutions that are designed to improve schools However, the effective schools move- ment, like most other reform efforts, has developed philosophical and political schisms along its major fault line the cen- tral tenet that children's learning can be improved if schools adopt effective prac- tices. At its heart, this belief is positive, useful, and practical–but it does engender strong opinions and political reactions. The imtial understanding that school practices and policies can make a differ- ence, even for children from homes in which parents have few educational or ft nancial resources, has now been translated into the popular mantra "all children can leam."Whatever happened to "due process of law" and "positive reinforcement? Herzberg, Maslow–wherever you are–we need you now more than ever! Time for Change If Edmonds were still with us, we be lieve he would be appalled at what has happened to the effective schools move meat Unfortunately, what began as a no–lis process to help low jasome cialdres schlere at higher levels has become in ed. ocational atharosa that pusiches both teachers and students and declares that schach are ineffective when all children do not leam at atitrary levels predeter mined by individuals external to the schools The dunking beland a simplistic inter- pretation of "all children can learn" sug gests that there is no need for adequate resources and child–friendly public policy.These facts help to explain what educators have long observed children from umpoverished environments in which they do not receive good nutrition and stimulating experiences, generally achieve at lower levels than children from more canching environments This concrete evidence should be enough to convince us that we should con- centrate on unproving the lives of children before they come to school and not simply proclaim that "all children can learn with out enacting proper publie policy to pro- vide economic opportunity for families, health care for all children, and parenting education for young mothers If we as a society can summon the cour age and will to do these things, then maybe all children can learn at higher levels and the gap berween low income and more privileged children can really be narrowed. The fallacy of the pros pot as soltin structional leader Promoung the principal as the sole mstructional leader may demean teachers. The principal may be a leader, but accountability for effective instruction be longs to reachers. Principals should under- stand instruction, and they can support it in many ways (for example, by ning excel- lent teachers and by promoting effective professional development for them), but they do not teach the curriculum If teachers cannot teach effectively. then principals must carry out their major accountability duty–evaluating employ. ees and dismissing ineffective ones. This is the most effective way that principals can improve instruction. Principals have many responsibilities for managing the school: introducing best practices, implementing policies, protect- ing the ethics of the profession, staying within budget, and promoting a belief sys- tem in support of public education, to name just a few. Principals have more than enough to do without

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taking over responsi bilities that belong to teachers The fallacy of setting standards on the basis of exceptions. Often, proponents of the effective schools philosophy cite a stu- dent who rose out of poverty or a school in which low-income children achieve at un- usually high levels. These exceptions are then used to tell the world that all chuldren can "pull themselves up by their boot straps" or that all schools can reproduce the results achieved by the one cited.To claim that "all children can learn without recognizing that some children start school on a very unequal footing burdens our schools and teachers with daunting and perhaps insurmountable harrier An enormous amount of time, effort, and money must be spent to "reclaim" and "remediate" children whose skills lag be hind those of their more advantaged peer Yet there is a widespread attitude that, if students and teachers cannot overcome the obstacles created by poverty and poor ou trition in the short amount of time available in the average school year, they have "failed." This pressure is especially strong when children and their teachers are ex- pected to achieve some arbitrary standard established by a state-mandated profi ciency test. The result of this attitude is that stu- dents rarely catch up, and teachers become demoralized. Sadly, this is the current situ ation in many of our nation's public schools. Even more alarming is the ten- dency of the news media to leave an im- pression that gaps in performance among student groups are related to skin color or ethnicity 6 Public policy in the US, is not as child- friendly as it is in many other countries, such as Sweden, Canada, Japan, or Israel What is needed most to help children is for politicians to make good on their promise that "all children will be ready to learn by the time they start school.In time, with enough effort and money and solid social policies, the achievement gaps between the advantaged and disadvantaged can narrow Unul then, however, it is unfair to treat all children and all schools "equally" by set- ting standards that are not equitable The assumption that all can incet these stan- dards-wuhout our providing education- ally disadvantaged children with the extra support they need to achieve at high lev- els-perpetuates injustice. As Edmund Burke stated, "The equal treatment of unequals is the greatest injus- tice of all."Not all children have high joality nutrition, stimulating homes, andextensive learning opportunities prior to entering school Research in cognitive brain develop ment shows that formation of synaptic contacts in the human cerebral cortex oc curs between birth and age 10, and most of the brain gets built within a few years af ter birth Environment matters grealy in brain development.Unintended Consequences Next, let us discuss the unintended con- sequences of the simplistic "all children can learn" approach. These include ? establishing accountability based on state- developed tests; ? downplaying the need for early inter vention for children who live ander conditions of poverty, and using punishment as a motivator to im prove schools Establishing accountabuity based on state-developed tests. The belief that "all children can learn" has spawned a move- ment of testing as the basis for student pro- motion, student graduation, evaluation of school personnel, and state and federal fund- ing Our experience with state-developed criterion-referenced tests leads us to the conclusion that most of these tests are el- ther too simple or too difficult.All children can learn, al some level, and most children, as Ronald Edmonds stated, can learn the basic curric alum if sufficient resources are provided The fallary, however, is the belief that all chileren can learn the same curriculum, in the same amount of time, and at the same led The problem with such an unexam ned belief is that it may be used to deny differential financial support for those who one to school with environmental dicol

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yamages.Tests created at the state level and imposed on schools may appear to be "politically correct," but their educational value is highly questionable. As Linda McNeil points out, forcing ar- bitrary punitive standards on scho 's un dermines both teaching and learning and results in "growing inequality between the content and quality of education provided to white middle-class children and that provided to children in poor and minority schools.The Fallacies When we look at many of the poten ually harmful policies and practices being implemented in schools today, we can only assume that they have been inspired by the following fallacies, which do not bear careful scrutiny the fallacy that all children can leam at the same level and in the same amount of time; the fallacy of the principal as sole 10- structional leader, the fallacy of setting standards on the basis of exceptoons and the fallacy of uniform standards for all children The fallacy that all children can learn at the same level and in the same amount of time.Those who pro- mote uniform standards (often state legislatures) promote a false system of evaluation that will probably disappear as rapidly as it has been established Although it is difficult to accept and even more difficult to admit, children in the United States do not have equal oppor- tunities to learn, nor do they have equal op portunities to succeed.In Texas, for example, McNeil found that, even though scores on the state- mandated Texas Assessinent of Academic Skills were going up in many disadvan- taged schools, teachers reported that stu- dents' ability to use the skills that had been drilled into them for the test was actually declining.We fervently hope that all children will be treated as individuals, achieving at var ious levels appropriate to their develop ment, and that they will not be treated as learning at the same level at the same time all marching to the arbitrary beat of a state proficiency test.Enacting public policy that establishes educational pro grans for very young children should be the major strategy for helping children achieve at higher levels and reducing the achievement gap between children of high and low socioeconomic status.This phrase sometimes confuses the public and deters the possibility of sub stantially helping disadvantaged children obtain a high-quality, resource-rich educa tion.In our view, because of the simplisuc acceptance of this phrase at face value, the effective schools movement as currentlypromoted is contaminated with a series of fallacies and a number of unintended con sequences.Assuming that all children can reach the same high standards through the heroic ef forts of educators, without major changes in education and social policy, is similar to assuming that doctors can make all chil dren healthy even though many do not re- ceive adequate home care and appropriate notrition.The idea that children and schools should be evaluated by a uniform criterion-usually a test score-has the potential to do untold da Uniformity of measurement leaves out human judgment--the most crit al ele- ment in decision making.In fact, she claims, "this system of testing is restratifying education by race and class Downplaying the need for early inter- vention for children who live under condi rions of poverty. The "all children can learn" mentality is dangerous because it may lead us to assume that all children can meet the same standards no matter how well or ill prepared they are to start school.Early inter vention stimulates cognitive development, improves sensory development, and in creases motivation to learn.7 The punishment mentality spawns take- over laws, zero-tolerance policies, threats to administrators of losing their jobs, and decreased funding for those schools whose students most need additional support.The hard truth is that exceptions occur under special circumstances that cannot usuany be replicated or that may be par- tially replicated only if sufficient

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resources are available.Of all the fallacies being pro- moted, this is probably the most bizarre, Decades of history and mountains of re- search indicate that childhood develop- ment is unique for each individual.This statement has been in- scribed on our national documents and should be chiseled into the hearts of all school personnel and those who enact edu cation pohcy.and those who have high-protein diets and lots of sensory stimulation tend to have more synaptic connections.Brains that do not get enough protein and stimulation in their environments lose connections, and some potential neural pathways are shut down.Certainly, examples of success can pro- vide lessons and models if they are consid ered thoughtfully.Frederick Herzberg is dead, and with him the sensible notion that punishment never motivates nor serves as an effective way to improve our schools.We offer the following ideas as a starting point for further, in-depth discus srons that can lead to more thoughtful school policies.Not one study in the school literature can correlate a test score with either student success or teacher ef- fectiveness.Pro- viding good early childhood education is a big and costly responsibility, but this strat- egy is just, extremely cost-effective in the long run, and a measure of the character of a nation.Such standards imply that all children can achieve at high levels if they choose to do so-one child did it, so can others.This assumption in turn excuses us from addressing the need for better early child- hood programs.It offers the best chance for all children to be ready to leam when they begin kindergarten.In either case, they are inappropriate measures of school effectiveness.However, we must be careful that this kind of thinking does not lead to standards that are set on the basis of exceptions.No additional help is needed!The fallacy of uniform standards for all children.Using punishment as a motivator to un prove our schools.The period of early childhood is critical in brain development.

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