

# THE GOALS 2000 EDUCATE AMERICA ACT AND THE NATIONAL STANDARDS IN EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *This paper is meant to outline the modalities in which The Goals 2000 Educate America Act started the reform based on national standards in American Education. After presenting the types of national standards focused on Opportunity to Learn Standards, the paper analyzes how the national standards are perceived in Romanian education, starting from a survey on representative subjects.*

**Key words:** *content standards, performance standards, Opportunity to learn standards, international standards.*

## 1. Introduction

The Goals 2000 Educate America Act is an example of how the Federal Government uses the funds to mandate state governments to undertake a certain type of educational actions. The legislation provides states funds to create reform plans. If the States accept the funds they must create voluntarily a reform plan, including content standards, performance standards and learning opportunities [4]. All these standards must have been certified by the *National Education Standards and Improvement Council*.

National Standards are often international standards, because they are designed so as to raise the labor force educational level in the United States at the level of other industrialized countries, so that the United States becomes more competitive in the international market. In fact, international standards mean the

educational standards of developed countries in Europe and Japan. To meet these standards, the U.S. Government is open for establishing a global curriculum similar to that of all industrialized countries. This curriculum is, in fact, the curriculum required by the international corporations. [4].

The reform of education was necessary to allow the U.S. to face competition with other countries. *'Without the goals and standards that GOALS 2000 provides we won't be able to rebuild our educational system and begin competing in the worldwide market'* [1].

## 2. Types of National Standards

Since 1989, various organizations have formulated national standards for what a student should know in a particular subject such as Mathematics, History, Arts, etc... These are content standards. It raises,

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however, the issue of how well a student should know these contents. They are called performance standards [4].

Establishing national contents and performance standards would lead to the possibility of establishing a national curriculum. One of the issues that arose was that many schools had the disadvantage that they might not ensure students the necessary opportunities to reach standards. A number of schools in the United States did not have adequate textbooks, qualified teachers, and the establishment of national standards without improving learning opportunities would have prevented the students from reaching the level of competence set by standards. [4]. Consequently, educators asked for national standards to contain some provisions, which may ensure the possibility that all students can learn contents at the level required by performance standards.

### 3. Opportunity to Learn Standards

In addition to the concern for performance standards and more rigorous scores accountability, other concerns were justified, especially that of blaming students if they did not reach high standards, because they had not received adequate learning opportunities. Therefore, *Goals 2000 Educate America Act* specifies standards for providing learning opportunities. The reason for stating these standards is clearly stated in the law. It is necessary for schools to be responsible for their students' results, and that responsibility must be measurable [2].

*The National Council on Education Standards and Testing* states that '*if not accompanied by measures to ensure equal opportunities to learn, national content and performance standards could help widen the achievement gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged in our*

*society*' [2]. Equity in education becomes questionable because equity does not mean using the same methods for all students. For example, students with disabilities should be treated differently when discussing Opportunity to Learn Standards. It is often thought that the standards are disadvantageous for students who come from poor families and from minority groups, who are at an impasse when increasingly high expectations and increasingly difficult contents are imposed on them. The same burden falls on students with disabilities if students with disabilities are not included when performance standards are implemented, there is a risk that they will be regarded as second rank citizens, for which teachers are not responsible. Therefore, it is considered by some educators that students with disabilities and disadvantaged students should be offered more learning opportunities, rather than having reduced expectations concerning their results. Schools must provide them qualitative education as a way to help them achieve high standards.

How do we define Opportunity to Learn Standards?

Opportunity to Learn Standards depend, to a large extent, on how the term is defined and how they are measured. In *The Goals 2000 Educate America Act*, Opportunity to Learn Standards are defined as '*the criteria for, and the basis of assessing the sufficiency or quality of the resources, practices and conditions necessary at each level of the education system to provide all students with the opportunity to learn the material in voluntary national content standards or state content standards*' [2]. National Opportunity to Learn Standards refer to the following aspects:

- Curricula;
- Resources and teaching technology;
- Teachers' professionalism;

- Alignment of curricula, instructional practices and assessment to content standards;
- The safety and security of learning environment;
- Non-discriminatory curricula, policies and educational practices;
- Other factors which help students receive equal opportunities that enable them to meet the requirements set by performance standards.

### 3. How the National Standards are perceived in Romanian Education?

In order to find out how the National Standards are perceived in Romania we initiated a survey starting from the hypothesis that there is an increased reluctance towards national standards from the part of Romanian students, teachers and parents.

#### 4.1. Description of the Sample Subjects

The research took place from February to July 2011, and 700 subjects from Braşov County were involved. The subjects' sample is differentiated according to certain criteria:

- Age: 24.6% (172) belong to the 15-20 age category, 25% (176) to that of 20 -30, and 41.7% (292) to 30 – 50 category, and finally the remaining 8.6% (60) to that of those over 50 years old. It may be remarked that most subjects belong to the 30-50 age category; their relation to the educational system is either a direct one (as students or teachers), or indirect as parents.

##### 4.1.1. Socio-occupational Structure

- **High school students:** 7.3% (51) from national colleges and high schools of Braşov (Unirea National College, Grigore Antipa

High School, Dr. Ioan Meşotă National College).

- **Students:** 37.4% (262) University students from the faculties of Psychology and Education, Medicine, Nursing, Sociology and Economic Studies, all of them belonging to Transylvania University of Braşov. Students were chosen from these domains, because their future careers will be concerned with the economic, social protection and health care systems, and of course, those from the Faculty of Education will become the future educators or specialists in educational issues. We selected subjects according to three essential factors with major influence on the educative system: the economic, social and educational environments.

- **Teachers:** 22% (154) of the subjects belong to the high schools' teaching staff of Braşov and to Transylvania University

- **Parents:** in proportion of 33.3% (233) are in their majority the investigated students' parents.

- **Gender:** 77% (539) of the subjects are women and 23% of them (161) men.

The American educational system has established national standards for students, schools, school districts and states. In the report *Romania of Education, Romania of Research*, the implementation of '*rigorous national standards for quality insurance*' is required, so far as regarding high schools' autonomy. [3] With regard to establishing performance and content standards for all students, Romanian teachers declare themselves the least in favor of this idea. Once again, their progressive tendency, which insists that students should be evaluated according to the capacities related to each student's level of psychological development, has an important influence.

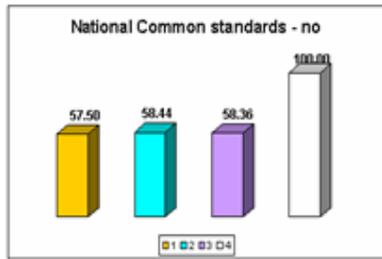


Fig. 1. 1) students, 2) teachers; 3) parents; 4) standard

There is a ratio of 58.44% teachers who want an assessment based on the students' individual progress, followed by 58.36% parents and 57.50% students (Fig. 1). There is a great reluctance towards common performance standards, although social efficiency, the preferred educational orientation, is based on them. This attitude relieves the generic acceptance of socially efficient education, but there is a significant reticence towards the competitive spirit, its essential characteristic.

An inclination to bring together a social efficient education with a student centered instruction and not a traditional teacher centered one is being noted in Romania.

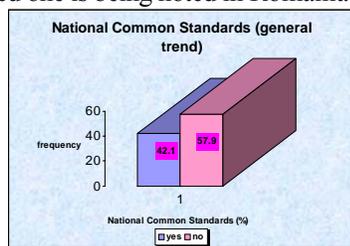


Fig. 2 National Common Standards (General Trends)

## 5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, a reticence towards national standards in proportion of 57.9%

and their acceptance in the proportion of 42.1% is noticeable (Fig.2).

Regarding establishing performance and content standards for all students, teachers are the least in favor of this idea. There is an increased proportion among them who want an assessment based on individual progress. They are followed by parents and students. In general, there is a reticence towards national performance standards, although social efficiency, the preferred educational orientation is based on them, which shows the generic acceptance of the orientation, but a large reserve to its specificity; the competitive spirit so the hypothesis is valid. *There is an increased reluctance towards introducing national standards and a low competitive spirit.*

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