NARRATOR: In today's educational climate there are many issues that affect how you design your classroom curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Dr. Robert Marzano meets with a group of teachers to discuss the state of education today and share his perspective on some of these pressing issues.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: I've been working in public education for over three decades now, and travel quite a bit. And I don't know about you, but for me these are unusual times. I mean, especially the last five years, the previous three decades were nothing like the last five years. So let me start with a question. How would you describe where we are in public education right now? And how do you feel about it? What do you think? Yeah? Larell.

MALE SPEAKER: I think now we have a different demographic of students in our classrooms. We have more English language learners in the classrooms. We have a wider disparity of abilities per grade level in the classroom. So some students are real high, some students are real low. So we either have to enrich those students that are high or reteach those who are real low.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Very nice, thank you. Does anybody feel any pressure? You what's that like? Kelly?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I would say with testing, I think they focus a lot for teachers in testing for just the reading and the math. And the kids don't really get a chance to get the well-roundedness of other subjects.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Thank you. Nancy?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I think for me personally, one of the things that I see is the pressure of scores, test scores, API scores. We have to raise the bar. We have to do this. We have to do that. And it seems like we're forgetting that we have to take into consideration these children as opposed to this number.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Thank you. Odessa?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I feel pressured to equally cover the curriculum, where there are more subjects than reading and math. But 3 and 1/2 hours of my day the state says you must teach reading and language arts. Oh, OK. Well, after lunch and in math, and so when do I teach science and social studies? Now I can't, in good conscious, send my fourth and fifth graders on to the next grade.
and haven't taught anything in science, anything in social studies. So something gets taken away.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Very nice. Others? Ways you feel pressure? Katrina?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I think that not only do you have the pressure of competing with other countries in terms of the educational style and performance level, but you also have the pressure of technology growing and expanding so rapidly now. So the teachers have to readjust from, say, the paper style of teaching to now a computerized style of teaching that students come into the classroom knowing already, sometimes OUR teachers don't know.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Thank you. Do you think the public has the impression that we're doing a good job, or a mediocre job, or a poor job? Yeah, Kevin?

MALE SPEAKER: I say mediocre compared to other countries. I think overall we're doing an OK job, but compared to other countries it does seem a poor job.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Thank you. Well, let me recap here. So you've said what I've heard all across this country, that the student demographics are different now, a wider range in terms of a variety of students, that and ability levels. The time, you know, how much time you have, how much time you have to teach the content. How much time it takes to teach the content. Focus on scores, the bottom line is this score in these subject areas. And that's what we're all about.

Kids in school are about much more than that. Coverage trying to address everything, or too much of a focus on certain areas, and we have to leave out other areas. What you've articulated, you've given a voice to the frustration I hear all across the country. We're in unusual times, we really are.

NARRATOR: One of the greatest challenges that teachers face today is the expectation that all students will meet high standards.

DOUGLAS B REEVES: You hear a lot of complaints about standards. There are too many of them. They're ambiguous, not ambiguous enough, too specific, not specific enough. I hear all those. And you know what, a lot of those criticisms have merit. But before we hear those criticisms of standards as a rationale to throw them all out and go back to what we used to have, let's ask ourselves, what is it that we used to have?

What we used to have was the bell curve. And one thing that we ought to be clear about is this, there are only two ways to evaluate students, comparing them to each other, the bell curve, or comparing them to an objective standard,
standards-based education. There is no third alternative. And so I will fully admit that standards are flawed, and that they need to be improved.

But the challenge that every educator has to face is how do we improve them, because if we abandon them, then we are going right back to the bell curve. And you know what the bell curve had, bluebirds, robins and blackbirds. The bell curve was all about saying, it's not about am I proficient. It's about who beat whom. Ask yourself this question. Have you seen kids who are in the 55th percentile, they're above average, thank you very much, feeling very good about themselves. And they can't write an essay to save their soul.

They're in the 60th percentile in math, and then you ask them to apply that algorithm in science, or in social studies, or heaven forfend in physical education. Oh you didn't teach me that. In other words, they have enough knowledge to beat some other kids. They don't have the knowledge and skills to meet a standard. So when we embrace standards, when we move from the bell curve to what I have called the mountain, the mountain being this narrow curve that takes place within a zone of success.

When we move from this world of winners and losers to this mountain curve, where to be sure there's differences within the mountain, but they're not differences between success and failure. They may be differences of speed. They may be differences of the way in which we achieved them. But we can still have differences and still have everyone meeting standards. When we do that, we'll have more kids who are successful. We have fewer kids who are evaluated based upon a comparison of child to child. We certainly have fewer kids evaluated based upon the speed with which they achieved a standard. And we have far more kids who are successful.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Current state of affairs in education for me can be summed up into one word, that's accountability. Fundamentally what that means is that the general public wants to know that their students are learning and exactly what they're learning and how that matches up with other countries. We've never really taken accountability very seriously in this country before, so we're playing a brand new game as far as I'm concerned.

Accountability goes hand in glove with the standards movement, given standards targets for what students should know and be able to do. A logical next step is to hold schools, districts, states, and individual teachers accountable for what students learn. It's unfair to say to that teacher, all of your students should be at a given standard by the end of the year. What is fair, though, is to hold teachers accountable for student learning.

And what that says is that what we realize students will walk in your door with different levels of knowledge or skill relative to this math standard, or this science standard, or this reading standard. And what we expect of you is that while
they're in your class, they learn. I think people operate more effectively when, in fact, they hold themselves to a standard, or they hold themselves to specific outcomes. As a school they're held to specific outcomes. It gives us something to shoot for and something to gauge our performance against.

So by and large, I say we're in better shape than we were before because of the accountability. So the current state of affairs in education, how did we get there. Many different stories. For me, the one that makes the most sense is it started with a nation at risk, 1983, when that document came out. Fundamentally said that as a profession, if you will, education is not succeeding, that we're not delivering what we can and should be delivering in terms of student learning.

You can make a case that some of the data they used to make that point wasn't accurate, or it wasn't the whole picture, but in fact, that was certainly reflective of the general opinion of that time. So 1983, Nation at Risk. Not too long after that, 1989, we had the first education summit under the Bush Sr. Administration. We set national goals. By the year 2000 students were supposed to master complex content, various subject areas, particularly math and science. As you know, we haven't reached that.

That spawned the standards movement, logical next step would be if we set goals in subject areas, what's the important content in those subject areas. Standards movement spawned many national and state level standards documents. By the '90s, virtually every state had their own standards documents. And by that time we started getting more serious about testing. States began to develop and implement high stakes state assessments, which goes something like this. If you don't do well on the assessment, you don't get a certain degree or a certain diploma. And that has now escalated in the beginning of the next century here, into even more testing, vis a vis, No Child Left Behind legislation.

And I think that's going to continue the demand for accountability. There is nothing wrong with being accountable. And the people who are asking us to be accountable have the right to ask the question are our kids learning, and exactly what are they learning. We can use this as a real level. We can use this as a tool for improvement.

NARRATOR: As you know, standards of accountability continue to be at the forefront in education. Initiatives such as Race to the Top reward states that show improvement in the areas of standards, assessments, data collection, and teacher and school effectiveness. A state-led initiative, the Common Core State Standards, were developed by teachers, school administrators, and experts to address rising concerns that the different state standards were not preparing students to be globally competitive, and were not consistent from state to state.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: You can make a case that these are kind of tough times. As a matter of fact, you can make a case that these are very bad times.
Well, let me put the perspective here a little bit. You can also make a case that because of research, we know more about teaching and schooling than we ever did before. We actually have more tools available to us than we ever did before. And just let me play that out a little bit. And I would really like to start with giving you, actually, a few scenarios and see what you think about the relative impact of these scenarios. You have to write this down. Here are five scenarios.

Now let me set it up first. Let's take my daughter, Carmen. She's 25 now, but let's make her a fifth grader. And let's say that in mathematics she's at the 50th percentile in mathematics. We move from our state to California. And we move into a very large district. Scenario number one, Carmen is assigned to an average school in terms of its effectiveness, the things that the school can do. And she has an average teacher for two years. You follow me? That's scenario number one.

Scenario number two, Carmen is in a highly effective school in terms of what the school can do, but she has a highly ineffective mathematics teacher, same teacher, for two years running. Scenario number three, Carmen is in a highly ineffective school. And she also has a highly ineffective teacher. Scenario number four, Carmen's in a highly ineffective school, again, but has a highly effective teacher for two years running.

And the last one, she's in a highly effective school and she has a highly effective teacher for two years. Here's what I'd like you to do, rank order those in terms of the environment where she would get the most learning, all the way down to the least amount of learning. And then compare that with the person next to you, your rank order.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Now I asked you to rank order them from the one where there would be the most learning down to the scenario where would there would be the least learning. Let's start from the bottom. So out of those five, which scenario would produce the least amount of learning in Carmen? What do you think?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Number three. Highly ineffective school, highly ineffective teacher.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: You guys thought-- obviously the highly ineffective school and the highly ineffective teacher gets the least amount of learning. Let me put some numbers on that. If Carmen were to enter that school at the 50th percentile in mathematics, two years later she would walk out at the third percentile. Now does that seem reasonable to you?

FEMALE SPEAKER: No.
DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Has Carmen learned? Well, actually she's learned, but she's learned so little that she's not keeping pace with her cohorts. And so what we're comparing her to, now, as each year, you know, the group of students at her same age level, age grade level. So she could be in fact, learning. But it's so sporadic that she's losing ground over time. What would be the next, the fourth in terms of its effectiveness?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Effective school and ineffective teacher.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: You've got a highly effective school, but a highly ineffective teacher. Let me give you some numbers there. Carmen walks in at the 50th percentile-- now this is the highly effective school, but the highly ineffective teacher. She walks out at the 37th percentile. Now it's not as bad as the last one. She's learning. Now in two years she's lost 13 percentile points, correct?

What's the next one in order of its--

FEMALE SPEAKER: Average school.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: You've got average school, average teacher. Carmen walks in at the 50th percentile, she walks out at the 50th percentile. Good scenario. She's learned and she's kept pace with her cohorts. She's not losing ground, she's not gaining ground. How about the next one?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Ineffective school, highly effective teacher.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Yeah, you've got it. Highly ineffective school, but a highly effective teacher. So she walks in at the 50th percentile. She walks out at the 63rd percentile. And then obviously, by default now, the last one is the highly effective school and the highly effective teacher. She walks in at the 50th percentile, she walks out at the 96th percentile. Now those numbers I gave you are from studies that I've done.

Different researchers give different numbers, so I would say take my numbers and everybody else's with a grain of salt. However, they all have the same pattern. Some people would say that you get more gain or less gain in any one of those scenarios, but basically everybody who looks into this phenomenon of the effect of the school versus the teacher, ends up with the same pattern.

So let me ask you, if those numbers are even remotely accurate, what's a generalization you can come to? Yeah, Katrina?

FEMALE SPEAKER: That you need an effective teacher to be able to effectively use the tools that you have in school to ensure that the child is getting a proper education.
DR. ROBERT MARZANO: What has more of an impact, the school or the teacher?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Teacher.

MALE SPEAKER: Teacher.

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: The scenario that amazes me the most is the highly ineffective school and the highly effective teacher. Even though there is chaos in the school, in that classroom when the teacher closes his or her door, kids learn. And they don't just learn enough to keep up with where they were, they go above and beyond that. And actually, there are some people would say that my numbers there are an underestimate.

I've said, you know, they'll gain 13 percentile points in two years. However, other researchers say in the classroom of a highly effective teacher, they'll even gain more than that. Now I started this by saying that I think one argument for the case that it's not a bad time in education it's a good time is research. Now research has shown us these numbers, but research also has looked into what makes an effective teacher.

Now for me, there is really good news here. The good news is that we can pinpoint what effective teachers do. Now let me qualify that. I think any teacher who wants can be effective. I don't think any teacher who wants can be great. By great, I mean the Jaime Escalantes of the world. There's an aspect of that type of teaching that doesn't lend itself to science. It's innate, you know, talent, I don't know.

But we know enough about good teaching that we can say if you want to be more than competent in this profession, you can be. To be way out there in terms of excellent, that might be something else. Good news is that science points us in that direction. And the even better news is that what it points to is common knowledge. I mean, it's really, when you look at what 35 years of research says, the effective teacher does, you could have figured it out yourself without looking at 35 years worth of research.

So I'm going to list four things that an effective teacher not only does well but has mastered. One is instructional strategies. The highly effective teacher has a wide variety of instructional strategies that they not only have mastered, but they make good decisions about their use. Number two is classroom management, highly effective teacher has strategies for various areas of classroom management.

Number three is the effective individual teacher engages in what I'll call effective classroom curriculum design. Number four is the highly effective teacher uses assessment as a learning tool, not just as an assessment tool, if you will. Put that all together, those four areas, instructional strategies, classroom management,
effect in curriculum design, and effective use of assessment as a feedback mechanism, what we find is that four areas that they're concrete. You can develop skill in that, become a highly competent educator.

And we've already seen the numbers the research indicates that, boy, a competent teacher, even in a school that maybe isn't competent, or isn't very good, can produce incredible results. The last thing that this research brings up to me is that I had said it's good news the areas we know that an effective teacher has mastered is pretty straight forward, that still doesn't mean they're easy.

And I've come to the conclusion that if a teacher wants to be effective, highly competent, that means they're going to have to put time and energy into the profession. You know what, at first I felt bad about that. I said, well, gee, that's just the wrong news, right, to give out. You know, you have to work hard to be competent here. It's going to take energy. Well, the more I thought about that, the more I thought, well, wait a minute, that's not bad news at all, because if you look at any area, any arena outside of education, if a person is competent, even if they're highly talented in that area, if they're competent, if they're doing well, they're uncomfortable by definition.

I would assert that Tiger Woods, as great as he is, naturally and with all the experience he's had, all the skill that he's built up, when he's winning a tournament, he's not comfortable by definition. You know, he's working at the edge. You know, and that brings a certain lack of comfort with it. So for me, that's just the name of the game. We want to be good at what we do, there's an edge to that. There's always a lack of comfort.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

JOHN COOPER: It is hard. There's no question about it. You have to love what you're doing. You have to come to school every day and want to be there. It's a difficult arena. It's a difficult profession. But it's the best one to be in because we certainly touch the future with every one of our students.

NANCY DAVIDSON: I think that there's a lot of stress, a lot of expectations on every teacher, probably everywhere in the United States. We play so many roles as teachers, because of the expectations and the requirements that are placed upon teachers today. But I still love my job. I love it every year. I get excited when the first day of teaching begins. There's always something special about every student. There's something special about every class.

And despite the anxiety that I sometimes have and the pressures that I sometimes feel, the joy of being in the classroom really can erase a lot of that.
JOHN COOPER: There is no more exciting profession to be in than in education. Even with the incredible amount of criticism that is directed at the public schools, there are phenomenal things happening every day in classrooms everywhere across this country. And I can't think of a profession that, on a regular daily basis, puts one in a position of really making a difference. I think that's one of the greatest things about teaching, that you know every day you have a chance to make a difference in kids' lives.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

DR. ROBERT MARZANO: Charles Dickens started his book, A Tale of Two Cities, with the phrases it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. And for me that's a great metaphor for the current state of affairs, if you will, for where we are right now. Because I've heard across the country people saying this is the worst of times. I've been in education for 30 years. And it's never been worse than this.

On the other side of it, I've heard people say this is the most exciting time in their lives, their professional lives. And so for me to make this a time of incredible opportunity is very exciting. It's very rejuvenating, if you will. And going along with that, the science of teaching is at a point where it's never been before. We've done 35 years worth of research on schooling across the country. And so in a sense, we're a brand new science, but 35 years worth of research with literally tens of thousands of studies, we know some things that work.

We actually know what schools can do to be more effective. We know what teachers can do to be more effective. And we have information to give students about what they can do to be more effective. So I think it is the best of times.