

# **CRISIS** *OR* *POSSIBILITY?*

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*Conversations About the  
American High School*

JAMES HARVEY | NAOMI HOUSMAN



**NATIONAL  
HIGH SCHOOL  
ALLIANCE**

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WASHINGTON, DC



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Carnegie Corporation of New York.*



**NATIONAL  
HIGH SCHOOL  
ALLIANCE**

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WASHINGTON, DC

### ***The Vision of the National High School Alliance***

A nationwide commitment to fostering high academic achievement, closing the achievement gap, and promoting civic and personal growth among all youth in the nation's high schools and communities.

### ***The Mission of the National High School Alliance***

To mobilize the resources, knowledge, and capacity of individuals and organizations to work collectively in shaping policy, practice, research, and public engagement for the excellence, equity, and advancement of all high-school-age youth.

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Please visit our Web site at <http://www.hsalliance.org> to learn more about the National High School Alliance.

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# *The National High School Alliance*

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## *Foreword from the Steering Committee*

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For more than twenty years, a great national debate has raged about how to improve American schools. Although much of the debate has centered on the performance of American high-school students, most reform effort has been directed at improving elementary schools. In recent years, new opportunities to concentrate on the high school have emerged. Public officials, researchers, and national leadership organizations have come to understand the critical importance of redesigning programs and options for high-school-age youth so as to provide all with excellence and equity.

One outcome of this new thinking was the establishment of the National High School Alliance (HS Alliance) in 2002. At a meeting in 1999, organized by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Milton Hershey School, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, a small group of key leaders first explored the idea of a national forum to keep high schools and youth a priority on the nation's agenda. Since then, a steering committee worked on organizational structure, developed the partnership, and planned a national agenda, creating what has become the HS Alliance. The HS Alliance is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, a forty-year-old leadership organization based in Washington, D.C. It is supported by funds from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The HS Alliance is a unique and potentially powerful new voice in education. The strength of the HS Alliance comes from its partners, a remarkable group of more than forty organizations that represent a diverse cross-section of perspectives and approaches. As partners of the HS Alliance, these organizations share a vision for excellence, equity, and advancement for all youth and a commitment to further this vision, both individually and collectively, by shaping policy, practice, and research and by promoting public engagement. The HS Alliance helps its partners realize their commitment by serving as a vehicle for mobilizing resources, networks, knowledge, and capacity. As a forum for professional discourse and collaborative work across educational organizations, the HS Alliance creates a new space in which alternative and potentially better formulations for promoting change can emerge.

The HS Alliance asserts that the challenge of improving high-school education demands the best thinking from all quarters, including those focused on transforming the high school as well as those focused on supports and structures to meet the needs of youth outside the high school. Rather than leaving the discussion in the hands of business and political leaders, who so often dominate educational decision-making, the HS Alliance puts the conversation squarely in the realm of educational leaders—experts in the practices, policies, and research that most impact high schools and youth.

A unique opportunity presented itself during the fall of 2003 when an unprecedented number of leadership organizations convened national meetings focused on the issue of high schools and high-school-age youth. The HS Alliance immediately committed resources for capturing and disseminating the themes and ideas that emerged from these meetings. This document, *Crisis or Possibility? Conversations About the American High School*, is the result. It is our hope that this report helps leaders maintain the momentum needed to continue these important conversations, and to commit to building the strong and supportive schools, systems, and communities the nation's youth need and deserve.

## The National High School Alliance Steering Committee

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## *Acknowledgments*

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The HS Alliance is indebted to each of its partners for their help in conceiving this report and their valuable advice and guidance as it was developed. After long days attending conference sessions, partners engaged with great vigor in debriefing conversations to share and debate the ideas that ultimately shaped this report.

The support provided by the conveners of the national meetings on which this report is based, many of whom are partners of the HS Alliance, is also acknowledged. Each was extremely generous in making it possible for the authors and partners to participate in the meetings and in providing the time and space needed to conduct post-meeting debriefing conversations.

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Additional acknowledgement is offered for support received from Monica Martinez, the founder of the HS Alliance, who has served as the senior advisor, as well as from Elizabeth L. Hale, who provides ongoing support for the HS Alliance's work through her leadership as president of the Institute for Educational Leadership.

Finally, as an organization, the HS Alliance enjoys excellent staff leadership from Naomi Housman, the HS Alliance Coordinator, and outstanding support from Nina Frant, Program Assistant, and Angela Hernandez-Marshall, Partnership Development Associate.

Steering committee members and staff especially want to acknowledge the contributions of James Harvey of James Harvey & Associates, Seattle, Washington, in drafting and revising this document.

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*“...the United States now stands on the threshold of a new commitment to equity.... In this new struggle, nothing is more important to the welfare of this society and its students than the reinvention of the American high school. Here we are about halfway home with a long distance to go.”*

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## *Executive Summary*

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**T**his document, *Crisis or Possibility? Conversations About the American High School*, provides an overview and analysis of how a series of national conferences held in the fall of 2003 framed conversations around high schools and high-school-age youth (see Figure 1 on page 6). This analysis explores the underlying assumptions of these frameworks and the extent to which they coalesced or diverged. The report also examines the content of the meeting agendas for common topics, as well as for topics that were either missed entirely or emphasized at only a few conferences.

It is apparent from the conversations at these meetings that powerful voices are backing the proposition that the time has come to re-think and reinvent the American high school. Although the goal of reinventing the high school is held in common, the rationale for proceeding is not. Supporting that broad consensus, expert agreement emerged around several key variables related to effecting institutional change. While this agreement may be used to support a vision for a new type of high school, details for implementation remain to be worked out. Agreement on what needs to be done, in short, is rarely accompanied by consensus on how to proceed.

### **Rethinking the American High School**

The central issue faced by participants at each of the fall conferences was whether the general-purpose high school of the twentieth century could be transformed into a high-quality learning organization for the twenty-first century. Participants responded in the affirmative, yet two quite different conceptions of how to proceed underlie this response.

The first response reflects a discourse of crisis. It is policy oriented and managerial; tends toward finger-pointing, top-down solutions; and claims that economic catastrophe lies around the corner. To support its case, this discourse encompasses worries about standards and assessment and reliance on analyses of economic needs, potential skill shortages, and inefficiencies in the system. Many analysts and policymakers favor this argument, in part, because it readily captures public attention.

The second approach reflects a discourse of possibilities. It is focused more on students than systems and pays at least as much attention to unequal resources as to unequal results. It seeks improved instructional practice in models of effective schools; and it places more hope in locally developed solutions than in national or statewide prescriptions. This discourse points to the strengths of the emerging “millennial generation”; turns to neuroscience for guidance on learning needs; and is generally more upbeat, positive, and student centered.

Can these two different approaches to reform be reconciled? That remains to be seen. Advocates of each tend to dismiss the value of the other’s approach outside conferences such as those described herein. The crisis discourse assumes that policymakers have all the answers required to proceed with curriculum alignment. The possibility discourse voices concern about whether leaders are asking the right questions.

## **Making a Difference**

Regardless of which lens is applied—crisis or possibility, the national meetings’ agendas tended to coalesce around seven key levers for change that can make a difference in effecting institutional reform. Those seven themes are:

- ◆ **K-16 education.** One theme that took center stage involved a commitment to begin thinking about K-12 and postsecondary education as integrated parts of the same system rather than separate entities. Meeting participants readily shared their thoughts on what greater cooperation and alignment between the two systems would entail.
- ◆ **College preparation as the “default” high-school curriculum.** Another widely shared consensus held that practically all students should be prepared for college-level work, in part because nearly three-quarters of graduates enroll in postsecondary education within two years of high-school graduation. Given the demands of an increasingly knowledge-based, global economy, high schools should not foreclose students’ access to and success in postsecondary education.
- ◆ **Teacher competence.** The improvement of teacher preparation and professional development at the secondary level figured prominently. Participants seemed convinced that high-school teachers need both substantive competence and new pedagogical strategies to work in restructured high schools, which are likely to be smaller learning organizations that require teachers to work across disciplines.
- ◆ **Literacy and language.** Educators universally agree that students unable to read by third or fourth grade require immediate intervention if failure is to be avoided. Widespread agreement at all of these meetings held that the

essential challenge around language was to ensure that all students can read at or above grade level. Some participants expressed urgency in addressing this challenge for English-language learners, a large and growing population in American high schools.

- ◆ **Dropouts and the educational pipeline.** Related to language and literacy is the astonishing dropout rate in American high schools. Pipeline metaphors dominate discussions of school performance today, with one widely quoted estimate holding that for every 100 ninth-graders, only 67 graduate from high school, 38 go on to college, 26 return for a second year, and 18 obtain a degree within six years of high-school graduation.
- ◆ **Scale and size.** The promise of smaller, more personalized learning received a great deal of attention at the national meetings. Changes in a school's structural and cultural characteristics are thought to encourage academic success by helping students feel they belong, providing more individualized contact between teachers and students, and fostering safe environments in which students can develop meaningful relationships with adults.
- ◆ **Revisiting standards.** A widely held view evident across the national meetings suggests that requirements for postsecondary education and employment are converging. Some suggested revisiting existing standards to make sure students have a variety of options for meeting them and that “we get the standards right,” as one speaker put it.

Addressing all these issues amounts to a daunting program for change. What seems clear from the national meetings is that, although some programmatic responses (e.g., responding to the challenge of dropouts) can be launched immediately, other considerations (e.g., developing a K-16 continuum) are likely to take much longer. Whatever the time frame, the message from the meetings was unmistakable: High-school transformation is not likely to be a by-product of general school reform. What should an agenda for high-school reform look like? And what specific guidance did these meetings provide for developing that agenda?

## Unfinished Business

Describing the ideal goals and outcomes of high-school reform is the easy task. Specifying how to accomplish it is far more difficult. HS Alliance partners concluded that, although most of the national meetings helped to define specific challenges to reform efforts and provide strong arguments explaining *why* high schools should do a better job, little guidance has emerged on *how* to bring about desired changes. Practical ways for attaining the described visions were in short supply.

The HS Alliance identifies four significant factors in transforming educational systems. These dimensions were identified after conducting a national scan of policies and programs impacting high schools and youth. This report analyzed the content of the fall national meetings against these four dimensions, as summarized below.

- ◆ **Aligned standards and assessment.** Although the national meeting agendas mirrored popular genuflection before the altar of standards and assessment, proposals for transforming these ideals into reality remained unclear. Consensus around specific standards was hard to determine. With a few notable exceptions, contentious issues were avoided. For example, regarding the use of standards in relation to students with disabilities or English-language-learners, the favored approach seemed oriented toward a “general” reform philosophy, leaving concerns about “special” needs for later redress. Such an approach, however, places large numbers of students with pressing needs for academic and social support at risk for neglect.
- ◆ **Preparation and development of educators.** Unfortunately, little attention was paid to an issue central to the success of transforming any high school—the preparation and development of educators. Claims that many high-school teachers lack certification in their specialties were *de rigueur*, but indications of effective solutions, or commitments to finance them, were lacking. Nor was much consideration given to the type of professional development high-school teachers need to help students construct their own learning or to work effectively across disciplines in newly restructured high schools.
- ◆ **Active, powerful, and knowledgeable communities.** This essential dimension was largely ignored during the fall meetings. Although common sense suggests and research findings document that parents and communities perform fundamental roles in sustaining effective schools, policy discussions concerning high-school reform in the United States remains largely an insider’s conversation. If the concept of “community” is invoked at all, the default assumption is a reference to the business community.
- ◆ **Innovations for transforming high schools.** The fall meetings dedicated significant time for learning about existing models of innovation. For the most part, however, the meetings did not allow time for in-depth discussion of the complexities and challenges of implementing these innovations. Current calls for reform emphasize the interdependent relationship between personalized learning communities and academic achievement. Both are essential for meeting high standards and creating productive futures, thus empowering all students. Linking supportive relationships with high standards for achievement in every school for every student presents a significant challenge to existing school structures and habits of interaction.

Bringing successful innovations “to scale” at the level of interpersonal interaction demands substantial and creative investments in organizational and human development.

As noted, the challenges still facing the high-school reform movement are substantial and demand further attention.

### **Halfway Home and a Long Distance to Go**

Despite an abundance of promising models, American high-school reform has a long way to go toward reaching the ideals that have been described. Tricky and difficult implementation challenges lie ahead. American business leaders like to speak of the Noah Principle. It’s a good metaphor for the next steps in high-school reform: “No more prizes for predicting rain. Prizes only for building arks.”

**Figure 1**  
**Calendar of National Meetings—Fall 2003**

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>DATES/LOCATION</b>	<b>SPONSOR</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>AUDIENCE</b>
American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions	September 29 Washington, DC	National Governors' Association/National Center on Education and Economy	Share examples of how to leverage reform on a large scale	Elected officials, leading educators, and scholars
High School Leadership Summit	October 8 Washington, DC	Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education	Dialog about high school and need to create seamless postsecondary transition	State policy teams and national leaders
Integrating English-Language Learners in High School Reform	October 20–22 Miami, FL	Council of Chief State School Officers	Connect high school reform with language and literacy for English Language Learners	School district teams, state education agency officials, and national leaders
Double the Numbers: Postsecondary Attainment and Underrepresented Youth	October 23–24 Washington, DC	Jobs for the Future	Create sense of urgency about gap in degree completion of underserved youth	School, district, state, postsecondary, and business leaders
Annual Policy Forum—Seeing it Through: Solutions to High School Reform	November 7–9 Indianapolis, IN	Council of Chief State School Officers	Develop policy strategies for state action to support systemic high school reform	State chiefs, lead deputies, and federal liaison officials
American High School Policy Conference	November 17–18 Washington, DC	Alliance for Excellent Education	Focus on federal role, equity, funding adequacy, and adolescent literacy	National and local leaders, including press and media
National Partners Meeting: Personalization and Social Supports for High-School-Age Youth	December 4–5 Philadelphia, PA	National High School Alliance	Explore personalization and support for high-school age-age youth	Alliance partners and Philadelphia leaders

**W**hat can communities do to improve their high schools? How can schools ensure that all students graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to take their place in the world? Is the comprehensive high school the last word in secondary-school organization in the United States? Or can this invention of the 1950s—along with its inheritance of course credits, Carnegie units, fifty-minute periods, discrete subject-silos, and relentless tracking and sorting of students—be re-conceived? Are today’s high schools keeping faith with a society that needs many more highly skilled graduates? Equally important, are high schools keeping faith with the changing needs of a new and different student body?

Questions such as these lay at the heart of a remarkable series of conferences convened by policymakers, researchers, educators, and analysts in the fall of 2003 to assess the state of the American high school (see Figure 1 for a list of these meetings). In a sense, these meetings constituted one of first critical and visible assessments of American secondary education since the adoption of the “Carnegie unit” early in the twentieth century and the development of the comprehensive high school two generations ago. The “Carnegie unit” encouraged a factory model of the high school by standardizing the reporting of the quantity of secondary-school work. The comprehensive high school, designed around the advice of James B. Conant, a former president of Harvard University, explicitly called for large high schools offering diverse curricular tracks based on student interest and abilities.

Simultaneously derided as a bureaucrat with “red tape in his veins” and hailed as a visionary, Conant, through his writings, pointed to the “social dynamite” of separate but unequal schools and the need for what he called an Education Com-

*“The big question is: Can we transform the general-purpose high school created in the twentieth century into a high-quality learning organization for the twenty-first?”*

Mel Levine, University of North Carolina  
CCSSO Annual Policy Summit  
Indianapolis, November 2003

mission of the States.<sup>1</sup> He recommended the consolidation of small schools and the establishment of bigger high schools, large and comprehensive enough to offer a variety of courses. He thought they should enroll a minimum of 750 students.

Conant was committed to democratic ideals. Convinced that schools are instruments of democracy and equal opportunity, he believed size contributed to that goal. By enrolling students from “all walks of life,” large high schools could bring all of a community’s young people together around a core of civic education and community solidarity.

But bringing all students together did not require teaching them the same thing. Conant’s espousal of community building went no further than the school hallway and extracurricular activities. In the classroom, he favored a highly differentiated curriculum that would sort students among courses and programs according to their “performance, inclinations, and ambitions.” Tracking, grouping, and applying differentiated curricula, by design, provided quite different, and often unequal, educational experiences for different students.

While refined over the decades, the high school designed by Conant fifty years ago can be found in recognizable form across the United States today. It is large, often enrolling 2,000 students, sometimes exceeding 5,000 or more. It offers such a bewildering variety of courses, programs, and electives that it has been described as the “shopping-mall high school.” It is typically so regimented in terms of bells, bus schedules, and fifty-minute class periods, that a national commission in the 1990s described learning in America as a “prisoner of time.” It effortlessly sorts students into different courses and tracks, sometimes based on little more than perceptions of their “performance, inclinations, and ambitions.” Despite all these imperfections, the American high school remains one of the last institutions in a diverse and divided United States through which this society struggles to express its aspirations for equality and opportunity.

The challenges that face America as it enters a new millennium, however, bear little resemblance to those that faced the nation when Conant was a national leader. Today, commercial products can be designed in one country, engineered in a second, manufactured in a third, assembled in a fourth, and distributed from anywhere on the globe. The world truly has become a small village. In Conant’s time, transatlantic calls had to be booked in advance with an operator. Now modern technologies make communications instantaneous, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The well-defined opponents of the Cold War have changed to poorly understood terrorist organizations. Industries that once effortlessly absorbed high-school dropouts into high-paying, low-skill jobs on assembly lines or doing piece-work have invested heavily in technologies to automate these functions and moved many tasks offshore where labor is cheaper. Jobs that once provided secure employment can now be performed as readily in Dublin or Delhi as in Dayton or Denver. In the service sector, immigrants perform many tasks for minimum wage.

Educational attainment also has been transformed. In 1950, only one in three white adults (twenty-five years of age and older) had a high-school diploma or more education, and just one in eight African Americans. Since then educational attainment had skyrocketed. By 2001, nearly 85 percent of white Americans held a high-school diploma or higher and so did 80 percent of African Americans.<sup>2</sup> (Data on Hispanic Americans were not collected in 1950; by 2001, however, 56 percent of Hispanic Americans had a high-school diploma. It is difficult to believe that figure was higher fifty years ago.) A high-school diploma has become the essential foundation of economic and civic life in the United States. Indeed, as discussed in chapter two, a growing public and expert consensus exists that individual economic success in the United States depends increasingly on access to postsecondary education.

In light of these changes, the central question facing American educators and community leaders was posed at the Council of Chief State School Officer's (CCSSO) Annual Policy Summit: "Can we transform the general-purpose high school of the twentieth century into a high-quality learning organization for the twenty-first?"<sup>3</sup>

## Two Different Conceptions

The answer offered at the national meetings was unequivocally affirmative. High schools can be transformed. Yet, two quite different conceptions underlie this response. The first framework is the most public, the most policy oriented, and the most managerial. It addresses the challenge in the language of crisis. It tends toward finger-pointing and top-down solutions. Discussions of education using this perspective have been familiar to the American public and policymakers at least since *A Nation at Risk* was produced in 1983. It argues that catastrophe looms, occasionally implying that schools and the people within them, if not somehow at fault, at least are not paying attention. Many analysts and policymakers, while trying to avoid the blame laying and finger pointing, have coalesced around this way of framing the problem.

The second framework is more optimistic. It promotes possibilities, a view that operates beneath the radar of newspapers and the media. This alternative framework focuses on the assets of today's schools, students, and communities, not the weaknesses. It points to emerging findings from neuroscience and other research that provide structures within which to develop curricula based on scientific knowledge of the learning process. It redefines a new set of the "three R's" —rigor, relevance, and relationships—as a launching pad from which to attack learning challenges. Educators, community-based organizers, and bottom-up reformers tend to frame educational reform in this way.

## **The Crisis Discourse: Diagnosis and Solutions in the Context of Systems**

Advocates of all kinds long ago realized that it is easier to get policymakers and the public to pay attention to an issue if it is framed as a problem or potential crisis. Social and economic crises—often overlooked when confined to low-income, minority communities—gain new traction in public discourse when perceived as threats to the middle-class, majority population. For example, school violence and bullying in urban schools has long been a cause for concern; however, a sense of national urgency emerged after comparable violence appeared in suburban and rural school districts.

Likewise, the American high school is now attracting national attention as it becomes evident that the long accepted “sorting and tracking” function is no longer viable if the nation is to remain competitive in an increasingly knowledge-based, high-skilled global economy. The traditional practice of offering a college-preparatory curriculum to a small number of students has become a major equity issue because postsecondary education provides access to the new economy. In addition to crisis-level dropout rates, the vast number of “general track” students are ill prepared to succeed in either the workforce or post-secondary education, according to leaders in business and higher education.

Among educators and the general public, a crisis discourse is gaining momentum.

### ***Crisis***

The language of crisis figures heavily in the today’s policy assessment of American high schools and the need to rethink their structure, purpose, and desired results. Throughout the national meetings in fall 2003, the crisis was defined most frequently in economic terms, although military images invaded the discussion as well.<sup>4</sup> High schools, participants were told, are the greatest failure of the American school system, in part because they do not build workforce capacity.<sup>5</sup> By the year 2020, the U.S. will face a shortage of workers with advanced degrees.<sup>6</sup> The pipeline from kindergarten through undergraduate enrollment is leaking badly.<sup>7</sup> Students are not adequately prepared for work in modern life, in which 70 percent or more of new jobs created will require some college-level skill.<sup>8</sup> Annually, the nation experiences at least 550,000 dropouts, which represents about 3,000 dropouts every day of the school year.<sup>9</sup> Among twelfth graders, about one in three scores below basic levels on national assessments.<sup>10</sup> Achievement levels for African-American and Latino seventeen-year-olds for reading and math are about the same as those for white thirteen-year-olds.<sup>11</sup> American students enter high school better prepared in both reading and math than students twenty years ago, but they are worse off when they leave.<sup>12</sup> The message is grim, relentless, and implacable.

## **Solutions**

Within the crisis framework, responses to problems identified are defined almost uniformly around the concept of “alignment.” First advanced by policy thinkers in the Clinton administration during the early 1990s, this approach was amplified and expanded by business and advocacy organizations as the decade developed. It is now enshrined in Federal law as the *No Child Left Behind Act* authorized in 2002. As a practical matter, the alignment concept calls for state-by-state agreement on educational standards by discipline, around which curriculum, textbooks, assessment, and teacher preparation and professional development can be aligned.<sup>13</sup>

Assessment—a major element of this response that requires states to establish accountability systems—involves further decision making based on the results of high-stakes testing of individual students and places greater responsibility on local schools for demonstrating progress in student achievement. Under the provisions of *No Child Left Behind*, documentation of “adequate yearly progress” toward closing the achievement gap in grades three to ten is based on annual assessments for every school in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Sanctions for non-performing schools are dependent on these new, annual assessments.<sup>15</sup> A high school’s ability to award diplomas is determined by these assessments.<sup>16</sup> The current administration backs the position of many analysts that, at some point, high-school exit assessments should serve as college admissions exams, becoming part of a new system in which successful completion of high school leads seamlessly into college admission and placement in college-level courses.<sup>17</sup> The alignment strategy tracks the nature of the crisis framework defined above. It is large and expansive, entailing the rotation of an entire system around an attractive goal—better specification of learning objectives that every student has the right to attain.

## **The Discourse of Possibility: Student- and Community-Centered Approaches**

Another more optimistic view has developed alongside the crisis discourse, one that emphasizes possibilities. While not ignoring the serious challenges of school reform, discourse within this framework focuses more on students than on systems. It pays as much attention to unequal resources as to unequal outcomes. It finds hope for improved instructional practice in models of effective practice and the implications of emerging research. It also places more hope in locally developed solutions than in national prescriptions.

### **Possibility**

While the language of crisis defines the first framework, the language of possibility resonates throughout the second. If prior decades can be defined as the “GI,”

“Silent,” “Baby Boom,” and “GenX” generations, children born since 1982 will be known as the “Millennial Generation.” According to authors Neil Howe and William Strauss, this new generation is as attuned to achievement and performance as any in U.S. history.<sup>18</sup> Despite what one reads in the press and sees on television, today’s young people, both majority and minority, are more law-abiding and abstemious than their immediate predecessors.<sup>19</sup> They are deeply social and service oriented, the ideal candidates for a reform agenda that is ambitious and plays to their expectations.<sup>20</sup> Cheerleaders for the millennial generation do not ignore the challenges facing the United States, but they insist that today’s young people are capable of meeting them.

At the same time, researchers have made remarkable progress in developing learning principles from neuroscience.<sup>21</sup> These findings promise new insights to help frame curriculum development around staged neuro-developmental functions. That is to say, this new research offers a very solid framework for developing curriculum by subject matter in a way that respects principles of learning educators have always known. Some neuro-developmental functions need to be in place in individual students (e.g., recognizing words) before others functions (e.g., sorting for meaning) can be tackled.<sup>22</sup> This research also helps confront learning challenges by providing scientifically valid, neuro-developmental profiles of students’ strengths and weaknesses from kindergarten through high school.<sup>23</sup> The neuroscience message is an asset-oriented, student-centered strategy that is research-based, upbeat, and positive.

### **Solutions**

Responses to the challenge of school reform, as defined in this approach, are equally student centered. They are less focused on systems alignment than on what is known about how to create healthy and productive environments for optimal adolescent development, both academically and socially. Problems exist, to be sure. Providing equitable funding may not be a sufficient response, but it is a necessary one, according to experts on school finance.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, new tools are being created in an effort to rework Conant’s inheritance. These new strategies address directly the complex needs of adolescents, including access to relationships with a range of supportive and caring adults who can serve as resources for their social, emotional, and academic development. One such approach involves a structural and organizational shift in scale toward smallness.

Different strategies to create high schools on a smaller scale are being implemented across the nation. Experiments include forming entirely new, small schools; converting larger schools into smaller learning communities, such as through career academies; and defining autonomous, small schools within large school buildings. Each of these strategies aims to banish the anonymity of the large, comprehensive high school so that students experience an environment in which every student is

known by, and connected to, a supportive and respectful network of adults.<sup>25</sup> Smallness also creates the conditions for a professional learning community among adults, so that teachers, school leaders, and community members can work in collaborative and reflective ways to support students.

There is no guarantee, of course, that small schools function any more effectively than large ones. The practical difficulties of creating such environments remain formidable. Hints about the challenges were gleaned from coffee-break discussions during the national meetings as superintendents and state officials tried to work through the politics of reshaping schools, school communities, and the athletics programs associated with them, particularly in rural communities. Tom Vander Ark, executive director of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and a national spokesman for the benefits of smallness, was challenged at the CCSSO policy conference for “proof of the academic value of small schools.” Such proof is hard to come by, acknowledged Vander Ark; but he noted, “Neither is there any proof for the academic value of large schools.” While scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of small schools is not yet available, many practitioners find that interacting on a smaller scale makes it possible to reach and support all students in personalized ways.

Students want, and are entitled to, more respect in their schools as communities of learning.<sup>26</sup> Students themselves call for smaller learning communities, in part because they seek environments in which relationships with important adults can be developed.<sup>27</sup> High expectations for all students are crucial. Given the current inequities in scope and depth of learning, educators should begin thinking of algebra and literacy as the new civil rights issue. Relationships are critical in the learning process; young people need to be surrounded by the kinds of adults they can envision themselves becoming. Relevance is an additional key characteristic of adolescent learning. One speaker spoke of “beefing up math and engineering to make it more appealing—otherwise, high school just becomes a long death march toward calculus.”<sup>28</sup> At the same time, communities and parents need to be brought into the discussion in meaningful ways.<sup>29</sup> One possibility is to organize schools and community mentors around learning that is applied within the context of the workforce and made relevant to real-world problems.<sup>30</sup> The qualities sought from applying these strategies are summed up by the phrase “rigor, relevance, and relationships.”<sup>31</sup>

The optimistic discourse of possibility approaches educational reform on a human scale in a way that builds upon the assets of youth and adults in the community. Policies and practices in this framework are inherently student centered. They seek to create school environments that are personal and supportive, thus providing the characteristics that youth need to develop academically and socially.

## Reconciling the Two Strands

A question to be asked is whether these two different approaches to high-school education can be reconciled. Are they so distinct as to have nothing in common? Or can they be combined in pursuit of the common goal of better high schools? In many ways, that remains to be seen. It is encouraging that, as these conversations developed at the national fall conferences, contrasts between the two approaches began to emerge. Less encouraging, perhaps, is that, beyond meetings such as these, advocates of each approach tend to ignore, gloss over, or dismiss the value of the other's approach. The crisis discourse assumes that policymakers have all the answers required to proceed with alignment. The discourse of possibility wonders whether leaders are even asking the right questions.

Some structured way to organize these conversations is needed so that the strengths and weaknesses of each framework can be realistically assessed, with weaknesses addressed and strengths brought to bear on high-school improvement. It is conceivable, but highly unlikely, that top-down reforms imposed by legislation might coincide with grass-roots reform developed with school and community backing. Absent some structure for encouraging continued interchange, the two strands of thought may never be reconciled.

Regardless of which lens one applies to the challenge of improving high schools, the 2003 meetings provided useful ways to think about transforming high schools. Seven levers of change developed from existing practice stood out. The first five enjoyed near universal support at the fall conferences; the remaining two drew a broad consensus. These change levers include the following:

- ◆ Commitment to K-16
- ◆ College preparation for all
- ◆ Teacher competence
- ◆ Literacy and language acquisition
- ◆ Tackling the dropout and “pipeline” issues
- ◆ Scale and size
- ◆ Revisiting standards

### **Commitment to K-16**

The required change most frequently urged at these meetings was a commitment to closer ties and greater alignment between public schools and postsecondary education. In educational circles, this is spoken of as “K-16,” a notion designed to capture all schooling between entry into kindergarten and graduation from college. The term simultaneously implies three separate but related concepts. First, the American economy’s growing demand for high-skilled workers calls for near-universal college attendance. Second is the idea that social policy should adapt to the first reality by extending the nation’s vision of required education from the traditional K-12 span to an additional four years of education or training beyond high school. The third is conceptually the simplest, but practically the most difficult. It requires aligning the two,

*“Education is the essential work  
of a democratic people.”*

Eugene Hickok, Undersecretary,  
U.S. Department of Education  
Jobs for the Future “Double the Numbers” Conference,  
Washington, DC, October 2003

## Early College High School

Early College High School is a concept promising every student entering ninth grade that within four to five years they will have earned a high school diploma AND completed two years of rigorous college work. Every student, whether they entered ninth grade with disappointing grades...whether they are still learning English...whether they planned on college or not. Every student...even if they believe they can't afford college.

This remarkable transformation occurs without the students changing schools, applying to college, or paying college tuition.

The concept is financed by a funding consortium led by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and is coordinated by Jobs for the Future. The concept aims to couple rigorous instruction with intensive support, compress the number of years to a college degree, and remove financial and other barriers to college. It works with several academic and community partners, including Antioch University in Seattle, City University of New York, and the National Council of La Raza.

By the end of the 2003–2004 school year, 25 pioneering early college high schools will be opened. The aim is to open 100 more in the next seven years, serving tens of thousands of students. These will be small schools demonstrating how to serve the intellectual and developmental needs of young people who now fail to complete high school or drop out of college in the first years.

This effort is a bold solution to the challenges of helping low-income students enter and complete college on time. It is based on the principle that academic rigor, along with the opportunity to save time and tuition dollars, are powerful ways to motivate students to work hard and meet serious intellectual challenges.

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*Source:* Materials distributed at the Double the Numbers Conference, sponsored by Jobs for the Future, Washington, DC, October 2003.

large existing systems—K-12 and postsecondary education—so as to bring their requirements into greater conformity.

Most Americans now consider a college degree to be the basic credential for launching a sustainable career. In fact, 80 percent consider a college degree more important today than it was a generation ago.<sup>32</sup> Within two years of receiving a diploma, nearly three-quarters of high-school graduates are already enrolled in some form of postsecondary education.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, because the economy is already demanding college-level skills for a large and growing proportion of all new workers (and for practically all employees in high-wage jobs), it makes sense to pursue a K-16 agenda in which high-school graduation requirements are aligned with postsecondary entrance requirements.<sup>34</sup> High-school reform, in fact, should be treated as part of a pipeline to higher education, with coursework tracked backwards to better align it with performance expectations, from postsecondary education to kindergarten.<sup>35</sup> In place of such backward mapping, however, research reveals numerous disconnects between K-12 and postsecondary education.<sup>36</sup> Several major barriers to implementing such an approach need to be addressed. First, research indicates that students don't understand very much about postsecondary admissions and placement processes, as shown by Michael W. Kirst and Andrea Venezia of Stanford University.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, placement exam standards bear little relationship to K-12 standards. Existing data systems do not address issues across K-12 and postsecondary education. Effective models of K-16 accountability systems do not exist.

The fall meetings yielded numerous suggested improvements for easing the transition between high school and college-level work. They ranged from an “early college high school” (see sidebar) to the state of Washington’s “Running Start” program and the state of Oregon’s alignment of high-school graduation requirements and assessments with undergraduate admissions. A lot of energy is already evident behind this movement.

Still, according to participants at the national meetings, further advancement of this strategy will take luck, political judgment, and skill. One panel member reported that the 1993 high-school reforms in Massachusetts were put in place as the economy boomed, which represented policymakers' good luck.<sup>38</sup> Those reforms also represented sound judgment—modest and incremental amendments responding in a practical way to public complaints. Moreover, the reforms enjoyed the support of the state's corporate, press, and academic leaders, a result that might be harder to muster around an alignment-and-innovation strategy in higher education. People like higher education. There is not a big constituency for change. The governance system is far more diffuse. Academic leaders can be expected to balk at efforts to re-orient a system currently organized around the research needs of faculty into one organized around the learning needs of students.

### **College Preparation for All**

At these meetings, a major consensus developed behind the proposition that preparation for college-level work must become the default curriculum for all high-school students. This means that high-school students, regardless of whether they plan to work or participate in postsecondary education immediately after graduation, are well prepared to seek admission to and succeed in college. Young people's initial preferences often change. Even those who are convinced they want to work often find themselves seeking college admission a few years after graduation. A college preparatory curriculum, as the "default curriculum," would maintain educational options for all students.

Some persuasive arguments support the case for a college preparatory curriculum.<sup>39</sup> College attendance is the goal of most families. In the last two decades, a dramatic upward shift in the education and skill requirements for most occupations has made access to higher education the threshold barrier for career success. Within two years of high school graduation, more than 70 percent of all students are taking courses at two- or four-year colleges. High-paying managerial and professional jobs go to those with college degrees; even high-paying jobs among technicians and craft employees are reserved for those with some college credit.

As a nation, the United States faces a shortage of highly skilled technical people with advanced degrees. A combination of baby-boom retirements and escalating skill demands promises a shortage of technical workers for American companies by the year 2020. Despite indications that significant numbers of high-skill jobs in companies headquartered in the United States are being outsourced overseas, it is estimated that U.S. firms will require 15 million more employees with advanced degrees by the year 2020 than American universities will be able to provide under steady-state projections.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, college attendance involves an equity dimension. Students who attend college, even for a few years, enjoy significant earning advantages over peers with high-school diplomas. The advantage amounts to 40 percent more in annual earned income or greater.<sup>41</sup> The data are irrefutable. Although urban legend has it that philosophy graduate students face a lifetime of washing dishes and driving taxis, the truth is that people with college degrees earn much more, on average, than high-school graduates—and people with advanced graduate and professional degrees enjoy even higher incomes.

In today's world, dropping out of school or school failure is unacceptable. In the words of Tom Vander Ark, "Every student should leave high school with good life options. They all need a variety of attractive options from which to choose. In effect, what this means is that all kids should be college-ready."

### **Teacher Competence and Commitment**

A number of ambitious proposals addressing teacher performance emerged from the fall meetings. U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education Susan Sclafani suggested strongly that policymakers "focus dramatically on teacher preparation."<sup>42</sup> As demands on student accountability increase, "teachers aren't asking enough of their students," she noted. The vision of *No Child Left Behind* cannot be met without highly qualified teachers, she observed, calling for "world-class teachers in every classroom." The United States clearly has a long way to go before that goal will be met—half of middle-school mathematics teachers have neither an academic major or minor in mathematics. Sclafani identified a related issue as the need to respond to the learning styles of today's students. Adults grew up in a different media environment from today's children, who absorb a daily bombardment of messages from radio, television, and portable music and video devices. The strategies used to teach yesterday's children are unlikely to work with today's.

Another significant theme was the importance of teachers who believe that each student in their classrooms can learn. "Parents are sending us the best kids they have," said one speaker comically. "I don't know anyone who's keeping their best kids at home."<sup>43</sup> Programs don't teach, teachers do, was her message. Give students what they want, which is rigor and relevance. This insight reflects a concern that Kati Haycock of the Education Trust has put forward consistently for several years. She argues that teachers expect too little from students in their classrooms, particularly in secondary school. Teachers and adults are likely to point to students' learning challenges, such as poverty and single parent homes, to explain low achievement. Haycock counters that students themselves almost always point to boring instruction and faculty members and administrators who have little confidence in them.

A major portion of the work of the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) revolves around providing teachers with the support they need to see themselves as learners, according to ISA president Gerry House.<sup>44</sup> “We need to help teachers see their work as reflective, active, and thoughtful. Then, they can view their students in the same way,” she observed. Shoring up teachers with a variety of supports also has received a lot of attention in system-wide plans in Boston and Alabama. Boston (see sidebar) relies on a collaborative coaching model and considers it to be one of the most powerful professional development tools invented.<sup>45</sup> A statewide literacy initiative in Alabama relies on professional development, providing ten days of training annually to help teachers improve reading in some 485 schools.<sup>46</sup> Although each approaches the issue of professional development in different ways, all three of these efforts rely on a self-evident truth. If nothing changes in the classroom, exercises to create visions and define standards will result in little change. If teachers are enlisted in the cause, however, a successful outcome is almost certain.

## Literacy and Language Acquisition

Widespread agreement existed among participants across the meetings that the essential challenge around language is to ensure that students read at or above grade level. This issue requires attention across the board and poses particular learning challenges for English-language learners.

Educators universally acknowledge that students who are unable to read by third or fourth grade need immediate reading intervention or they will fall rapidly behind their peers. An inability to read by the middle of elementary school is a marker for future problems. Discussions at the policy conference convened by the Alliance for Excellent Education revealed other findings that are not nearly so well understood, by either educators or the general public.<sup>47</sup> About 25 percent of secondary students nationally read “below basic” levels.

## District-Wide Reform in Boston Public Schools

Carrying reform through requires stability, according to Boston school superintendent Thomas Payzant. The Massachusetts assessments are “very high stakes but very high quality.” He notes that “standards and assessments encourage students to think and work.” Boston schools have made progress closing the gap, according to Payzant, with a theory of action that:

- ◆ Focuses on where change happens—the classroom
- ◆ Provides leadership support
- ◆ Encourages small high schools in which relationships can be built
- ◆ Relies on an emphasis on reading and mathematics, backed up by data and analysis.

One of the lessons of the Boston experience is that shared leadership and professional development are essential to turning around high schools. “We have a collaborative coaching model organized around workshops” says Payzant, “that we believe will be one of the most powerful professional development efforts ever.”

The workshops emphasize that teachers must explore how they use time. In 90-minute workshops, 20 percent of the time is devoted to a mini-lesson taught by a master teacher; 60 percent is reserved for teacher teams to analyze and study challenges to teaching and learning in their classrooms; and the remaining 20 percent is reserved for pulling lessons from the workshop together.

“When teachers see students doing work they didn’t think the students were capable of doing, the scales fall away from their eyes,” says Payzant. The workshops have really challenged the norm, he notes. “The old norm held that the relationship is between you as a teacher and your students. The workshop norm insists that the relationship is more complex. It’s you and your kids, but it’s also you and your teaching colleagues, and you and the school.”

*Source:* Presentation at the meeting American High School Policy Conference sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, November 2003.

## Literacy Coaches

Troubled by the realization that many secondary school students are not reading well enough to master the complicated material in their textbooks? Enter the literacy coach.

School districts around the nation are acting on the knowledge that literacy is not the responsibility of English teachers alone. Teachers in all content areas can develop the skills students need to read, write, solve problems, conduct research and experiment.

Understanding that secondary literacy cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach, these districts are working with “literacy coaches” to help teachers, and teams of teachers make judgments about what their students need. The key is supportive staff development designed by these literacy coaches, who are themselves master teachers providing important leadership for the school’s overall literacy program.

Literacy coaches work directly with students who have particular difficulties in reading and comprehension, but their major role is working with teachers across the curriculum to help them implement strategies designed to improve their students’ ability to read, write, and succeed in class. Coaches often organize literacy leadership teams to review assessment data and to develop school literacy goals. They provide in-service training for their colleagues and make available to them the latest and best thinking from literacy experts.

Preliminary analyses and anecdotal evidence indicate the value of these coaches is improving students’ literacy levels. Still, the number of coaches is relatively small, and the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that providing one coach for every twenty classrooms in the nation would require an additional 10,000 literacy coaches.

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**Source:** Elizabeth G. Sturtevant, *The Literacy Coach: A Key to Improving Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools*. (Available at the American High School Policy Conference sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, November 2003.)

They are unable to comprehend the advanced curriculum materials that support the high-school learning experience. The reality is that 6 million middle- and high-school students who read below grade level have little chance of academic success without literacy efforts focused specifically on their particular needs (see sidebar). In high-poverty, urban schools, more than half of incoming ninth-grade students read two to three grade levels behind. On average, African-American and Hispanic twelfth-grade students read at the same level as white eighth-graders.

English-language learners comprise an important and growing group of students with unique literacy needs.<sup>48</sup> Nationally, this is a major and growing population. Immigrant students whose native language is Spanish make up a large proportion of English-language learners, with growing numbers of non-English-speaking students from Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. In the United States today, any city of moderate-size is likely to enroll a student body in which more than forty different languages are spoken. Complicating the pedagogical task is the need to distinguish between adolescents who are literate in their first language and English, those who are literate only in their first language, and those who are literate in neither.

## Tackling the Dropout and “Pipeline” Issues

The astonishing dropout rate in American high schools, particularly those in big cities, may be related to poor literacy rates.<sup>49</sup> If students are unable to understand the material they are expected to read, it is hardly surprising that 70 percent of eighth-grade students never graduate, according to some estimates.

“Pipeline” metaphors abound in dropout discussions. By one estimate, of every 100 ninth-graders, just 67 graduate from high school, 38 go on to college, 26 return for a second year, and 18 obtain a degree (either a bachelor’s or an associate’s) within six years of graduation.<sup>50</sup>

As in virtually every area of national life, race and class closely approximate success in terms of high-school graduation. Graduation rates are highest in small, rural, homogenous, and largely white states such as North Dakota, Utah, and Iowa, each of which boasts an 85 percent graduation rate or higher. They are lowest in depressed, rural, Southern states with low-skill economies such as South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia, each with graduation rates of 57 percent or lower.<sup>51</sup> Such differences in outcomes are unfortunate in a nation that believes “education is the essential work of a democratic people,” in the words of Undersecretary of Education Eugene Hickok. Many leaders are watching to see whether New York City’s school-restructuring efforts will decrease dropout rates (see sidebar).

Another related factor may involve “college readiness,” which implies that students have completed a rigorous program of high-school studies comprising four years of English and at least three each of mathematics, science, foreign languages, and history. Students who have completed such a program should not be required, in the normal course of events, to enroll in remedial courses as first-year college students. To the extent that “college readiness” is a marker of success for high-school completion, this indicator largely favors white adolescents.

Figure 2 compares the eighteen-year-old population, by ethnicity, with those who are ready for college and those who enter college. It reveals clearly that Asian and white American students are disproportionately represented among both the college-ready and college-attending populations. African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, by contrast, are disproportionately under-represented. Many observers conclude that the proportion of minority students enrolling in college and experiencing success will remain disappointing until more receive “college ready” preparation.

**Figure 2**

**Proportion of Population that is College-Ready and Enters College, by Race and Ethnicity<sup>52</sup>**

Race/Ethnicity	% 18-Year-Old Population	% of College-Ready Population	% of Students in College
African American	14	9	11
Asian	4	5	6
Hispanic	17	9	7
Native American	1	0	1
White	64	77	76

### Scale and Size

Another theme that came through clearly during the fall meetings is the sense of isolation that many students commonly experience amidst the anonymity of large high schools. Many experts pointed to the depersonalization experienced by students in large schools as a contributing factor in the Columbine High School

## Innovative and Relevant by Design

There are numerous challenges in America's high schools and communities, but there are also many good things happening.

About three-quarters of U.S. high school students attend schools enrolling 1,000 or more students. As the high school-aged population continues to increase, the nation can expect to see about \$84 billion dedicated to constructing new schools and remodeling existing ones.

It makes sense to think of creating smaller, more personalized high schools. That's the rationale behind a variety of school reforms around the nation supported by the U.S. Department of Education and several philanthropic organizations. The following examples are among the most promising innovations presented during the national conferences during fall 2003.

- ◆ University Park in Worcester, MA is a partnership with Clark University that provides internships in the world of work, expectations aligned with college admission, and a fast-track to college as part of the Early College High Schools program.
- ◆ The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has helped support about 700 new, small high schools and facilitated the restructuring of another 700.
- ◆ Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools has generated several hundred high schools refocused around nine essential principals. These are schools such as Nathan Hale High School in Seattle, which restructured itself from a large, comprehensive and anonymous high school into one with several distinct "houses" and a requirement for a capstone senior project each year. Each "house" holds students for two years with the same teachers.
- ◆ The Cristo Rey Network of Jesuit high schools provides a template adopted by four schools since 1996, with another seven scheduled to start in 2003–04. Using NASSP's "Breaking Ranks" as a resource, the Cristo Rey schools break down departmental barriers, insist that all faculty be bilingual, and prepare students for college in a bilingual atmosphere that also provides them with paid employment internships.

*(continued on next page)*

tragedy in suburban Littleton, Colorado, in which a teacher and fourteen students died, including the two students who assaulted the school.

At one of the fall meetings, a panel of high-school students emphasized that they and most of their peers would rise to meet the challenges put before them. They insisted that students take expectations seriously if four critical dimensions are present:<sup>53</sup>

- ◆ Small learning communities are important because they help students feel they belong.
- ◆ Expectations must be aligned with encouragement, which lets students understand that teachers respect them as individuals and learners.
- ◆ Adult relationships are one of the most significant correlates of whether students are motivated, engaged, and take their academic work seriously.
- ◆ Students need safe environments in which to learn and caring adults to motivate them.

The promise of smaller learning communities received a great deal of attention at the fall meetings (see sidebar). Over the years, Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools has insisted that community be at the heart of what a school is all about. More recently, the U.S. Department of Education has invested considerable sums in promoting the benefits of smallness, principally through the Smaller Learning Communities Program. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation also has invested heavily in creating small, alternative learning communities.

The Gates Foundation-funded schools aim to become "breakthrough schools," according to Tom Vander Ark, with ambitious goals for 80 percent graduation and college-attendance rates.<sup>54</sup> The heart of the program, he notes, is a strong foundation in good design principles that assist a network of some 700 new, small high schools with a learning network and high-quality research assistance.

## Revisiting Standards

Although not as dominant as the other themes, one leitmotif of these meetings was a sense that it's time to revisit state standards. Now that the public commitment to standards-based reform is well established, the political will must be summoned to adjust them according to principles of flexibility, parsimony, reliability, and congruence with emerging science.

No one quarrels with the commitment to high standards. A widely stated view holds that requirements for postsecondary education and employment are converging. Since that is the case, graduation requirements should be aligned with those needs. Against that reality, graduation tests should assess what students know at the end of high school, not eighth- or tenth-grade skills and knowledge.

Several speakers suggested common-sense modifications to existing standards. Students should have a variety of options to meet standard requirements, and states should explore a variety of different assessment techniques.<sup>56</sup> "It is essential to get the standards right," stated Vander Ark, flatly. "If you have 4,000 standards, you have too many. This is politically difficult, because it means states may have to re-open this discussion." Hilary Pennington, chief executive officer of Jobs for the Future, suggested that rigorous standards, grounded in literacy and numeracy, should be aligned with postsecondary education and serve as a basis for high-school graduation.

At these meetings, there was a sense that chief state school officers were less than enthusiastic about the prospect of re-opening the standards discussion. A major presentation on emerging neuro-developmental themes from Mel Levine, University of North Carolina, suggested to the chiefs that politically developed standards (e.g., typically resulting from negotiations among political, economic, and disciplinary interest groups) deserve re-examination in terms of the validity of their science. Levine's analysis (see Figure 3) points to ways curricula and school expectations, from pre-school through grade

## Innovative and Relevant by Design

*(continued)*

- ◆ The Thomas A. Edison High School/John C. Fareira Skills Center in Philadelphia began implementing the Talent Development High School Model in 1999. The model, developed at Johns Hopkins University, targets large high schools with attendance and discipline problems as well as lagging achievement, offers a double dose of reading and math in ninth grade, and fosters a more personal learning environment. Since the 1998–99 school year, Edison's percentage of graduates, compared with the size of the ninth-grade class, grew from 31 percent to 36 percent, attendance has increased from 65 to 77 percent, and lateness has dropped from 500 students a day to fewer than 50. Test scores on the most recent state accountability system (PSSA) increased at Edison for both reading and math despite the increased number of test takers, many of whom would have dropped out of high school in prior years. Math scores have grown by 20 points and reading scores have grown by 40 points over the last three years. The student population of approximately 3,000 is predominantly Latino, with many at or below the poverty line. The school is the largest multiracial high school in Philadelphia.
- ◆ Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas, has been implementing First Things First, a whole-school reform design developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education. Wyandotte, a struggling school on the verge of closing, was brought back from near-death after breaking down into smaller houses, each with its own emphasis.

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*Sources:* Presentations at various conferences: The American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions, convened by the National Governors' Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, September 2003; Annual Policy Conference convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers, November 2003; and the conference on English-Language Learners and High School Reform convened by the Council of Chief State School Officers, October 2003.

**Figure 3**  
**A Neurodevelopmental Take on Learning**

We have an opportunity to revolutionize high school education based on what we now know about learning — about neurodevelopmental functions, dysfunctions, profiles, and minds that beg to differ, according to Mel Levine of the University of North Carolina. We need to understand how these constructs are related and inter-related. It's complicated, but an investment in understanding these constructs and how they play themselves out in the classroom is likely to pay big learning dividends down the road. First we need to understand the functions, or constructs. Here's a map with a few examples:

CONSTRUCTS	PRESCHOOL–GRADE 1	GRADES 1–3	GRADES 4–8	GRADES 9–12
<b>REGULATION</b> <b>Attention</b>	Attention to detail	Task completion	Extended mental effort	Previewing, self-monitoring
<b>ORDERING</b> <b>Temporal Sequential</b> <b>Spatial</b>	Musical rhythms Visual boundaries (page lines)	Math algorithms Read, decode, spell	Narrative writing Use computer graphics	Historical perspectives Math and science reasoning
<b>PRESERVATION</b> <b>Memory</b>	Episodic memory	Rote learning	Rapid, simultaneous recall	Summarize volumes of knowledge
<b>INTERPRET/IMPLEMENT</b> <b>Language</b> <b>Neuromotor</b> <b>Social Cognition</b>	Vocabulary growth spurt Eye-hand coordination Emerge from parallel play	Decipher word problems Cursive/connected writing Respect give and take	Oral and written fluency Sports gross motor skills Quest for intimate friends	Abstract, figurative language Display artistic or other talent Accommodate peer pressure
<b>SOPHISTICATION</b> <b>Higher-order cognition</b>	Experience with trial and error	Learn and apply rules (as in spelling)	Demands for critical thinking	Multiple alternative solutions for problem-solving

twelve, can be related to five, big “neuro-developmental constructs.” These constructs are regulation, organization, preservation, interpretation and implementation, and sophistication—corresponding roughly to what educators and experts think of as (1) attention; (2) spatial and temporal ordering; (3) memory; (4) language, social cognition, and neuromotor functions; and (5) higher-order cognition.

Levine’s message was, “In our enthusiasm for standards, let’s not get ahead of ourselves.” It’s appropriate to demand rapid, simultaneous recall from students in the middle-school years, but not in the early grades when young people are still struggling with rote learning. Effective high-school students preview the work they have to do (e.g., visualize the finished product in the same way carpenters picture the deck they’re about to build), pace themselves, and monitor their own performance. According to Levine, “The memory capacity required in high school exceeds the memory needs of any profession in the United States. Let’s not forget that high-school students change topics every fifty minutes. We’re encouraging a system that produces valedictorians who are capable of mastering mountains of material through rote regurgitation, but who may be ineffective in the work of life.”

“Ideally,” said Levine, “we’d like teachers to be able to perform ‘brain surgery’ on their own subject matter. In physics, which of the constructs have to be in place to get an ‘A’? What would produce a ‘B’?”

State standards could also be related to the neuro-developmental constructs developed by Levine and his colleagues, a task that chiefs asked their staff to explore.

## **A Daunting Agenda**

In combination, these seven considerations—K-16 alignment, college preparation as the default curriculum for all, supporting better teaching, improvement of literacy and language acquisition, sealing the pipeline and solving the dropout challenge, scale and size, and revisiting standards—represent a daunting agenda. Some of these items will require years, if not decades, of trial and error, for example, developing a K-16 continuum that harmoniously blends two massive systems, each with its own governance system, funding stream, and traditions. “Brain surgery” on curriculum sounds effective, but that too is likely to be part of a long-term agenda. Still, efforts to address several of the other considerations (e.g., dropout prevention, literacy programming, and the establishment of smaller schools), can be achieved within a shorter period, although demonstrating results will still take time.

Whatever the time frame, however, what seems clear is a growing recognition that transforming high schools will not be accomplished as a by-product of a general commitment to school reform. Secondary schools, both middle and high, are quite distinct institutional creatures. They are not simply elementary schools with older students, but more akin to liberal arts colleges in their organization. This distinction undoubtedly requires an agenda focused on high schools as part of the general reform movement. The next chapter addresses what an ideal reform agenda might look like and reviews how the fall meetings fulfilled, exceeded, or fell short of that ideal.



It's clear that an expert consensus exists around the proposition that high schools in the United States should be reinvented to meet emerging needs of schools, individuals, and society. The goal is ambitious: an equitable system that helps all students meet high standards and serves all students well. Virtually every one of the conferences described herein presented similar arguments in favor of *what* the challenge is and *why* high schools should do a better job. But few of the presenters provided much guidance on *how* desired changes were to be accomplished.

Defining what needs to be done is the easy task. Specifying how to accomplish it is a more challenging requirement. Brilliant presentations about the nature of the problem, and the complexity of the difficulty, provided excellent overviews of the need to improve teaching, patch up the pipeline, align systems, and ensure all students a decent start in life. At the fall meetings, exhortations, demands, and extensive lists of “shoulds” and “oughts” were plentiful. But, practical ways for attaining these visions, and examples of what they might look like in practice, were in short supply.

The truth is that these meetings treated some important issues in a vague, even cursory, manner. Although one meeting focused specifically on English-language learners, most tended to skirt this difficult terrain despite the large numbers of such students in the nation's schools. The needs of students with disabilities were largely overlooked. Yet, at one of the meetings summarized herein, the state chiefs circulated a letter to the U.S. Secretary of Education protesting the NCLB requirement that these two groups of students be assessed with, and compared against, the entire student population. Communities and parents were mentioned at the meetings, but often as afterthoughts. It wasn't always easy to label precisely what was being discussed. For example, in discussion of the central issue of K-16 alignment and the inter-related topic of college preparation for all students, definition of

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*“What’s missing is the HOW of creating a system of support at the state and district levels for high school reform.”*

*Typical comment made during conference debriefings with HS Alliance partners*

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distinct issues was elusive. By the term “college,” did participants mean a four-year institution? A two-year community college? Or did they also include proprietary postsecondary trade preparation? Were all participants committed to preparing all students for college? Or were some more comfortable with another formulation, preparation for college or work?

Perhaps uncertainty is to be expected. Conferences and meetings, after all, are places where large visions are put on the table and big dreams are laid out. But the hard work of turning visions and dreams into reality is the stuff of committee hearings, board investigations, and staff analysis. That work lies ahead and might be advanced by considering these conferences against the implications of “four dimensions of change” guiding the work of the HS Alliance.

## **Four Dimensions of Change**

The HS Alliance identifies four dimensions that it believes must be addressed in order to advance a nationwide commitment to fostering high academic achievement, closing the achievement gap, and promoting civic and personal growth among all youth in the nation’s high schools and communities. The HS Alliance identified these dimensions based on a national scan it conducted of policies and programs targeted to impact high schools.<sup>57</sup> These four dimensions include the following: aligned standards and assessments; preparation and development of educators; active, powerful, and knowledgeable communities; and innovations for transforming high schools. The HS Alliance believes that these dimensions must be addressed if equity, excellence, and advancement for all high-school-age youth are to be achieved. To what extent did these national meetings advance each dimension?

### ***Aligned Standards and Assessment***

Of the four issues, alignment received the greatest attention across the fall conferences. At each of the gatherings, the consensus favored a system-wide framework of aligned standards and assessment so that common expectations would be held for every student. The intent was that students become prepared for postsecondary education by being equipped for each successive year of school, aware of expectations at each level, and thus ready to make a successful transition into college or the workforce.

The meetings did little, however, to advance implementation of standards-based reform. At each, to be sure, participants genuflected before the altar of standards and assessment, but the issue of how these ideals are to be transformed into reality on the ground remains unclear. Although commitment to standards is almost universal among experts and the public, consensus around specific standards remains harder to pin down. An underlying assumption—that curriculum, materi-

als, and other resources would be forthcoming to help teachers prepare students for more demanding standards—has yet to be realized. This is a particular challenge for students who enter high school substantially behind the starting line. Indeed, some worry that one unintended consequence of the “adequate yearly progress” requirements of *No Child Left Behind* may be a perverse incentive that encourages schools to push students with the greatest learning challenges out of school. Recent indications that the U.S. Department of Education will be more flexible about assessments for English-language learners and students with disabilities may ease this concern. But the initial anxiety was real—schools that worked hard to bring such students up to standards over the five to six years required to reach the goal faced the possibility of being penalized for not making progress quickly enough.

Several reviews indicate that most states have not fully aligned their assessments with their standards. The creation of high-stakes tests on which diplomas ride is creating political headaches for states across the country. Equally troubling, standardized tests do not map well with curricular approaches emphasizing project-based learning, performances, or portfolios. Nor do tests conform to standards for success required in college work. A study from the University of Oregon presented at the Jobs for the Future conference examined sixty-six exams from twenty states. The vast majority of state assessments in English and math, according to the study, are either “not well aligned” with what is required for college success or “inconsistently aligned.”<sup>58</sup>

On most of these matters, participants at the conferences were silent. Still, several skated out over the thin ice of re-examining standards, advocating that it is better to take the time needed to get standards right than to insist that they are inviolate.

Another notable feature of the meetings, with the exception of one of the two convened by CCSSO, was the lack of serious discussion about specific student populations, such as immigrant students, English-language-learners, and students with disabilities. The approach taken by most of the meetings seemed oriented toward a “general” reform philosophy, with an unspoken assumption that students with “special” needs will be addressed at another time or venue. In addition to reinforcing traditional inequities, this shortsighted approach fails to account for the substantial proportion of “special” student populations represented in many high schools. For example, the last decade saw a 105 percent increase in immigrant students classified as “limited English proficient.”<sup>59</sup> As students such as these comprise a larger proportion of the total student population, orienting toward a general reform philosophy runs the risk of neglecting significant numbers of students with pressing needs for academic and social support.

Specific student populations represent distinct “cultures” that traditionally have been pushed to the margins within school systems. In a diverse democracy, all

groups deserve representation at the table when decisions are made. Reforms should not perpetuate existing inequities or re-segregate students. Such a development would tacitly acknowledge that the learning enterprise had lost sight of its purpose.

When the needs of specific student populations are omitted from the high-school reform agenda, often it is because those educators with the most expertise and experience working with them are left out of the process. On a very practical level, general reform advocates have a lot to learn from experts in areas such as disability, second-language literacy, and even from rural educators and Title I specialists. Each of these specialized educators possesses knowledge about what is involved in personalizing instruction to meet individual students needs—a core premise of most “general” high-school reform innovations.

### ***Preparation and Development of Educators***

Attention to the preparation and development of educators must be a core component of any effort to improve outcomes for high-school-age youth. Beyond hand wringing and finger pointing, however, effective programmatic responses are elusive. On this subject, the conferences exhibited disappointing results. Problems were defined, but effective solutions were few and far between.

Two inter-related issues lie at the heart of the problem—content knowledge and pedagogy. With regard to content knowledge, subject-matter expertise among teachers is important, particularly at the high-school level. Unlike elementary teachers, high-school teachers are specialized and most view themselves as teaching a specific subject and belonging to a particular department. It is troubling to find, as studies have for decades, that many high-school teachers are not certified in the specialty they teach.

Attention to the “content crisis” threatens to overwhelm an equally serious challenge. Too often high-school teachers do not—and are not expected to—move students beyond “facts and figures” into modes of critical, cross-disciplinary work that challenges students to construct knowledge, rather than simply reproduce it. In light of this demanding pedagogical standard, it is clear that most policy discussions are not asking the right questions. The reality seems to be that many high-school teachers and high-school programs emphasize coverage of subjects, not depth of coverage, much less an emphasis on how to think. It is important that teachers help students delve deeply into a discipline as well as understand its relationship across disciplines. The purpose of high school should not be about passing assessments, but in helping students see the connections between what they are doing in class and the lives they will lead in the world beyond school. The challenge lies in articulating a vision for effective high-school teacher preparation and ongoing professional development that harnesses content knowledge and skills in combination with the qualities that define high-quality teaching practice at the high-school level.

### **Active, Powerful, and Knowledgeable Communities**

This essential dimension of community engagement was largely ignored at the fall meetings. Common sense and a growing body of research document the fundamental roles that parents and communities play in developing and sustaining strong schools. Many studies of both parochial and private schools, for example, conclude that the success of these schools rests as much on community and parental commitment to school goals as on the high expectations that are placed on their students.<sup>60</sup> In some of the lowest-income neighborhoods in the United States, parents and community members have played major roles in initiating and sustaining school reform.

When parents, youth, and educators become knowledgeable about education reform issues, receive leadership training, and organize to work collaboratively, remarkable things happen in local schools (see sidebar). They are able to play multiple roles as advocates for and defenders of the system and of their children's needs. An organized community develops tight-knit school and community relationships and provides many resources to neighborhood schools. Community members can hold schools accountable while advocating for increased equity, improved instruction, and a school climate conducive to learning. Schools, youth development agencies, and community organizations must be brought together more closely around a common agenda of improving schools and encouraged to strengthen relationships and tap into the resources of active, powerful, and knowledgeable community members.

Little of this thinking was apparent at the national meetings. To the extent that communities were invoked, the conversation often seemed to assume primary involvement of the business community. Business representatives spoke of the needs of corporations and local and national economies, but rarely of community or family. They described how to manipulate the political environment, not how to navigate local learning challenges. They indicated that it was impor-

### **Parent Institute for Quality Education**

PIQE's mission is to bring parents, schools, and the business community together as equal partners in the education of every child. It envisions communities in which parents and teachers collaborate to transform each child's educational environment, at home and at school, so that all children can achieve their greatest potential. PIQE works with many Hispanic and Latino students and maintains offices in California, Texas, and Arizona.

One analysis of the "pipeline" in California helps motivate PIQE. In 1988, 131,138 low-income Latino students entered kindergarten. By the year 2000, 57 percent had dropped out of school; 16 percent entered higher education (community colleges or the state university system; and only 2 percent graduated from campuses of either the University of California or California State University.

PIQE's philosophy is straightforward:

- ◆ all parents love their children and want a better future for them
- ◆ every child can learn and deserves the opportunity to attend and complete a college education
- ◆ parents and teachers need to work together to ensure the educational success of every child
- ◆ learning is a natural process for children, one that parents and teachers facilitate.

To advance that philosophy, PIQE relies on a program with three components. Nine weeks of classes (at the elementary and middle and high school levels) to inform parents of what is available for their children and how they can help. A follow-up program to stay in touch with parents and students, and a teacher workshop that provides techniques for working with ethnically diverse immigrant parents and engages teachers in reflection and dialog.

At the secondary school level, the curriculum for parents emphasizes the following:

- ◆ Adolescence is a time of change and growth
- ◆ Positive communication enhances self-esteem
- ◆ Obstacles that get in the way of success
- ◆ How to motivate teenagers to read
- ◆ How the school system functions and where the road to college can be found.

Evaluations indicate that PIQE helps raise achievement scores and empower parents.

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*Source:* Presentation at the meeting on English Language Learners and High School Reform, sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, Miami, Florida, September 2003.

tant to be at the table when “cut scores” are defined on state standards, but not the appropriateness of any particular standard. They spoke knowledgeably, in brief, about school reform from a market perspective, but not from the viewpoint of communities or parents.

### ***Innovations for Transforming High Schools***

Overall, the fall meetings devoted considerable attention to this dimension. Agendas featured numerous models of innovation, with opportunities to discuss their components and the technical support available to schools and districts. For the most part, however, these meetings did not allow for in-depth discussion of the complexities and challenges of implementing these innovations.

Current calls for reform emphasize the interdependent relationship between personalized learning communities and academic achievement. The premise of this reform is that high-school students thrive in personalized learning environments in which they are known by, respected by, and have access to a network of supportive and caring adults within the school. Another key premise is that high-school students engage in learning when they are able to connect subject matter to real-world problems that are relevant to their lives. While these premises hold true for most adolescents, they are particularly important for the sustained engagement and motivation of students at-risk for school failure. Thus, both personalization and academic rigor are essential for empowering all students to meet high standards and create productive futures.

Despite growing awareness that strong, supportive relationships between students and adults are an integral part of effective schools and educational programs, most high schools remain organized in ways that make it difficult for adults to know students well. Efforts to respond to a wide range of adolescent needs are often approached as add-on components disconnected from academic achievement, rigorous curriculum, and high teacher expectations for student success. Linking supportive relationships with high standards for achievement in every school for every student presents a significant challenge to existing school structures and habits of interaction. Bringing successful innovations “to scale” at the level of interpersonal interaction demands substantial and creative investments in organizational and human development.

The fall meetings did not go far enough in engaging leaders in discussions of the challenges of bringing innovation to scale. One of the issues requiring more attention is the relationship between restructuring organizational features and the capacity building needed to support these changes. Too often, an overemphasis on the structures and mechanics of reform—e.g., the scheduling and assignments that create smaller units—diverts attention from the capacity building that educators need to transform the school into a personalized environment supporting each student’s academic and

social development. As Michelle Fine noted, unless attention is devoted to transforming the culture and core activities of teaching and learning within new structures, small schools risk becoming little more than large schools “in drag.”<sup>61</sup>

The concept of smaller, personalized high-school learning environments has moved from the sidelines of high-school reform to center stage. It is estimated that one thousand or more of these promising innovations will be implemented in high schools across the nation.<sup>62</sup> However, the challenges still facing the high-school reform movement are substantial and demand further attention.

## Debriefings

Following each of the national conferences, the HS Alliance led debriefing discussions with its partners and leaders from the convening organizations to tease out key themes, tensions, and implications for the HS Alliance. These conversations revealed a common thread, captured in a comment that was repeated numerous times. “What is missing is the how of creating a system of support at the state and district levels for high-school reform.”

Partners felt the conferences provided excellent frameworks for understanding issues but rarely offered insights on what they might look like once applied in practice. What are the different roles of state leaders, school boards, superintendents, university presidents, board chairs, community-based organizations, and the business community? What about parents? Or citizens when less than one-quarter of households have a child attending public school? Answers to questions such as these were not forthcoming, even though audiences at most meetings were already familiar with the broad shape of the argument being put forth and agreed on the topic’s importance.

## Halfway Home and a Long Way to Go

American schools (and American society) have traveled a long, sometimes difficult, but always exciting road since the creation of the “Carnegie unit” a century ago. They have lived through Conant’s vision of comprehensive high schools. They dismantled the concept of “separate but equal schools” after the 1950s. They have emerged from the Great Society programs of the 1960s and the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. Although that journey has not always been easy, the United States now stands on the threshold of a new commitment to equity, to equal outcomes, and to leaving no child behind. In this new struggle, nothing is more important to the welfare of this society and its students than the reinvention of the American high school. Here we are about halfway home with a long way to go.

Despite an abundance of promising models and powerful presentations about the shape of a newly aligned system, rarely was the “how” of creating systems of support at the state and district level put on the table. The models themselves stand out against the larger reality in that Conant’s creation remains everywhere, vibrant and strong. Although several new reports released in early 2004 (see sidebar) serve to advance new ideas and strategies, many difficult questions have yet to be addressed. What, specifically, will be required of legislators and chief state school officers if change is to be brought to scale? How should school boards and superintendents (and university trustees and presidents) advance these agendas? Where are unions and teacher organizations on these matters? Are parents and community-based organizations truly on board? What will be involved in aligning the two massive enterprises that make up the nation’s public schools and its postsecondary enterprise? What will these proposals cost? How long will they take? Who takes the first steps? On matters such as these, the meetings were largely silent. The devil, as always, lies in the details.

Tricky and difficult issues of implementation define the next part of the high-school reform agenda. In the short run, critical and urgent issues demand attention, such as preventing dropout and building literacy, and can be addressed programmatically. We know enough to act. But in the longer run, precise paths through the political and administrative complexities involved in aligning K-16 systems still need to be surveyed and laid out. That’s where the next great round of meetings on high-school reform should focus—implementation challenges. Business leaders like to speak of the Noah Principle. It’s a good metaphor to guide the next steps in high-school reform: “No more prizes for predicting rain. Prizes only for building arks.”

## Seminal Reports Released in 2004

*Engaging Schools: Fostering High-School Students’ Motivation to Learn.* National Research Council, 2004.

In early 2004, the National Research Council issued *Engaging Schools: Fostering High-School Students’ Motivation to Learn*, a report that takes a student- and community-centered approach toward transforming high schools. Drawing on years of research in psychology, education, and sociology, the authors show that students often lack any sense of purpose or real connection with what they are doing in the classroom by the time they reach high school. The report encourages teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the wider community to think creatively about ways in which school settings and instruction can be tailored to address that sense of alienation.

*Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High-School Reform.* National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the Educational Alliance at Brown University, 2004.

Written as a field guide, *Breaking Ranks II* was designed to help high-school principals and their leadership teams improve the learning experience of every student. It provides illustrations of possible entry points or areas in which begin can reform; strategies for implementing successful reform; and profiles of successes, challenges, and results of implementation.

*Ready or Not: Creating a High-School Diploma That Counts.* The American Diploma Project, 2004.

*Ready or Not* is based on two years of work with 300 employers and faculty members from two- and four-year institutions and draws on new quantitative research on the educational background of the current workforce. The report defines the level of English and mathematics that high-school graduates must have mastered to succeed in first-year courses or in jobs with solid futures and recommends actions that schools, states, postsecondary institutions, and employers can take to close the gaps.

*A Shared Agenda: A Leadership Challenge to Improve College Access and Success.* Pathways to College Network, 2004.

*A Shared Agenda* issues a challenge to the nation’s leaders, urging them to address the large gaps in college enrollment and completion that persist for many low-income and minority students and students with disabilities. The report culminates three years of collaborative effort in gathering research, conducting discussions, and encouraging debate on how society can meet the imperative of college access and success for all young people. *A Shared Agenda* offers broad policy recommendations and suggests specific steps that leaders in government, education, and communities can take to improve college access and success for underserved students.

## Endnotes

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- 1 See, for example, *The American High School Today* (1957) and *Suburbs and Slums* (1961). The Education Commission of the States (ECS), as recommended by Conant, was established a few years after he died.
- 2 See Chapter 1, Table 8, “Years of school completed by persons age 25 and over and 25 to 29, by race/ethnicity and sex: 1910 to 2001,” *Digest of Educational Statistics, 2002* (Washington: National Center on Educational Statistics, 2003).
- 3 Mel Levine, Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning, University of North Carolina, at the Annual Policy Forum of the Council of Chief State School Officers, November 8, 2003, Indianapolis, IN.
- 4 See *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and also “Preparing American’s Future: Challenges, Issues, and Possibilities for America’s High Schools and American Youth,” Rod Paige, of Secretary of Education, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), “The High School Leadership Summit,” October 8, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 5 Dane Linn, National Governors’ Association, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors’ Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 6 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors’ Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 7 David Valladolid, Parent Institute for Quality Education, at the meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, “English Language Learners and High School Reform,” October 20–22, 2003, Miami, FL.
- 8 Anthony P. Carnevale, Educational Testing Service, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17–18, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 9 Senator Patty Murray at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 10 Kati Haycock, The Education Trust, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), “The High School Leadership Summit,” October 8, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 11 Kati Haycock, The Education Trust, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), “The High School Leadership Summit,” October 8, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 12 Kati Haycock, The Education Trust, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), “The High School Leadership Summit,” October 8, 2003, Washington, DC.

- 13 This is the broad nature of arguments advanced by Dane Linn and Hilary Pennington at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors' Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, "American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions," September 29, 2003, Washington, DC; and by Thomas Houlihan, Council of Chief State School Officers, at the Annual Policy Conference sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, November 7, 2003, Indianapolis, IN.
- 14 The complete text of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation can be found on the web site of the U.S. Department of Education at [www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html).
- 15 Susan Sclafani, Assistant Secretary of Education, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), "American High School Policy Conference," November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 16 Marc Tucker, "High School and Beyond: The System is the Problem and the Solution." Conference paper for the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, "Double the Numbers," October 24, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 17 Michael W. Kirst and Andrea Venezia, "The Case for Improving Connections between K-16 Schools and Colleges." Conference paper for the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, "Double the Numbers," October 24, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 18 Neil Howe at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, "Double the Numbers," October 24, 2003, Washington DC; and William Strauss at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, "American High School Policy Conference," November 17, 2003, Washington, DC (co-authors, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*).
- 19 Neil Howe at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, "Double the Numbers," October 24, 2003, Washington DC; and William Strauss at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, "American High School Policy Conference," November 17, 2003, Washington, DC (co-authors, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*).
- 20 Neil Howe at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, "Double the Numbers," October 24, 2003, Washington DC; and William Strauss at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, "American High School Policy Conference," November 17, 2003, Washington, DC (co-authors, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*).
- 21 Mel Levine, Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning, University of North Carolina, at the meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, Annual Policy Forum, November 7–9, 2003, Indianapolis, IN.
- 22 Mel Levine, Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning, University of North Carolina, at the meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, Annual Policy Forum, November 7–9, 2003, Indianapolis, IN.
- 23 Mel Levine, Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning, University of North Carolina, at the meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, Annual Policy Forum, November 7–9, 2003, Indianapolis, IN.
- 24 Samira Ahmed, Campaign for Fiscal Equity; Jack Moreland, Covington Independent Public Schools; Senator Patty Murray; and Congressmen Chaka Fattah, Rubén Hinojosa, and Chris Van Hollen, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, "American High School Policy Conference," November 18, 2003, Washington, DC.

- 25 Tom Vander Ark, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, speaking at the Annual Policy Forum of the Council of Chief State School Officers, November 7–9, 2003, Indianapolis, IN.
- 26 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, “Double the Numbers,” October 23, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 27 Panel of students, organized by the Public Agenda Foundation, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), “The High School Leadership Summit,” October 8, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 28 Stefanie Sanford, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 29 David Valladolid, Parent Institute for Quality Education, at the meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, “English Language Learners and High School Reform,” October 20, 2003, Miami, FL.
- 30 Judy Murphy, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Chicago, at the meeting sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers, “English Language Learners and High School Reform,” October 22, 2003, Miami, FL.
- 31 Stefanie Sanford, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 32 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, “Double the Numbers,” October 23, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 33 Anthony P. Carnevale, Educational Testing Service, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 18, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 34 Dane Linn, National Governors’ Association, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors’ Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 35 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 36 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 37 Findings from the Bridge Project at Stanford University, presented by Michael W. Kirst and Andrea Venezia at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, “Double the Numbers,” October 23, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 38 James Peyser, Massachusetts Board of Education, at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, “Double the Numbers,” October 23, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 39 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, “Double the Numbers,” October 23, 2003, Washington, DC; Anthony P. Carnevale, Educational Testing Service, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 18, 2003, Washington, DC; Kati Haycock, The Education Trust, at the meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE),

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- 40 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors’ Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 41 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors’ Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 42 Susan Sclafani, Assistant Secretary of Education, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 43 Phyllis C. Hunter at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 19, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 44 Gerry House, Institute for Student Achievement, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 45 Thomas Payzant, Boston Public Schools, and Ellen Guiney, Boston Plan for Excellence, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 46 Katherine A. Mitchell, Alabama Reading Initiative, at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 47 Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17–18, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 48 For a discussion of these issues see Michael L. Kamil, *Adolescents and Literacy: Reading for the Twenty-first Century* (Washington: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003).
- 49 Dropouts and other high-school issues are addressed in Lyndsay Pinkus, *Progress Report on American High Schools, 2003–04* (Washington: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003).
- 50 Hilary Pennington, Jobs for the Future, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors’ Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, “American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions,” September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 51 *Progress Report on American High Schools, 2003–04*, page 35.
- 52 Jay Greene, The Manhattan Institute, 2003, reported in *Progress Report on American High Schools, 2003–04*, page 21, in material distributed at the meeting sponsored by the Alliance for Excellent Education, “American High School Policy Conference,” November 17, 2003, Washington, DC.

- 53 The High School Leadership Summit, a meeting convened by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, October 8, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 54 Annual Policy Forum of the Council of Chief State School Officers, November 7–9, 2003, Indianapolis, IN.
- 55 Dane Linn, National Governors' Association, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors' Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, "American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions," September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 56 Dane Linn, National Governors' Association, at the meeting sponsored by the National Governors' Association and the National Center on Education and the Economy, "American High School Crisis and State Policy Solutions," September 29, 2003, Washington, DC.
- 57 Monica Martinez and Judy Bray, *All Over the Map: State Policies to Improve the High School* (Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, 2002).
- 58 David T. Conley University of Oregon, at the meeting sponsored by Jobs for the Future, "Double the Numbers," October 23, 2003, Washington DC.
- 59 Lucy Hood, *Immigrant Students, Urban High Schools: The Challenge Continues* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003).
- 60 See, for example, Paul T. Hill, *High Schools with Character* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1990) and Arthur G. Powell, *Lessons from Privilege: The American Prep School Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 61 Michelle Fine, City University of New York, at the National High School Alliance partners meeting, December 3, 2003, Philadelphia, PA.
- 62 Given the scale of the investment from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as the investment of the U.S. Department of Education in the Smaller Learning Communities program, 1,000 high schools is a conservative estimate.





## The National High School Alliance Partner's List (as of May 2004)

Academy for Educational Development	National Academy Foundation
Alliance for Excellent Education	National Association of Secondary School Principals
American Federation of Teachers	National Association of State Boards of Education
American Youth Policy Forum	National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	National Center on Education and the Economy, America's Choice High School
Career Academy Support Network, University of California—Berkeley	National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, University of Minnesota
Carnegie Corporation of New York	National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform
Center for the Social Organization of Schools, Talent Development High School Program, Johns Hopkins University	National Council of La Raza
Center on Education Policy	National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
Chicago Community Trust	National League of Cities
Coalition of Essential Schools	National Youth Employment Coalition
Consortium on Chicago School Research	New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Public Secondary Schools
Council for Basic Education	Pathways to College Network
Cristo Rey Network	Public Education Network
Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform	Rural School and Community Trust
Education Alliance at Brown University	Southern Regional Education Board, High Schools That Work
Education Trust	University of Georgia, College of Education
Forum for Youth Investment	What Kids Can Do
Institute for Educational Leadership	W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Institute for Research and Reform in Education, First Things First	
Jobs for the Future	
Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University	
MDRC	



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