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School have allowed it to be more accountable to its school community and better serve its students.

Joining a Movement for America's Youths

High schools of all sizes can improve to better meet the needs of today's students. They will need to focus on elevating expectations for all students and accepting accountability for results, expanding choices for students and creating relationships with students, building teacher quality and improving principals' leadership, and strengthening ties to education and training institutions beyond high school. These goals can be met by working with colleges, universities, community colleges, training programs, and employers.

School boards, principals, and teachers can't do it alone. Youths need to be at the table—to have their voices heard. Parents need to be involved—to understand the need for change. Mayors and other elected officials need to get engaged—to marshal the resources of other programs that touch youths. Community, faith-based, and civic organizations need to take part—to raise expectations and expand opportunities for our youths.

The High School Initiative in Action

In October 2003, Secretary of Education Rod Paige launched the Preparing America's Future High School Initiative. This initiative is designed to support state and local leaders in creating educational opportunities that will fully prepare American youths for success in further education and training, as well as to prepare them to be participants in a highly skilled U.S. workforce and productive and responsible citizens.

The three goals of Preparing America's Future are to:

- Equip state and local education leaders with current knowledge about high schools through special forums, print and electronic materials, and targeted technical assistance;
- Develop the expertise and structures within the Department of Education to provide coordinated support and outreach toward helping state and local education systems improve high schools and outcomes for youths; and
- Facilitate a national dialogue to raise awareness about the need for significant reform in American high schools.

On Oct. 8, 2003, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education kicked off the high school initiative by hosting a leadership summit in Washington, D.C. The summit brought together 700 education and policy leaders to discuss innovative, effective methods for transforming high schools into top-quality learning institutions. To continue the national dialogue on high school restructuring, the Department held a series of seven regional high school summits to help state teams create short- and long-term plans for strengthening outcomes for youths, improving high schools, and meeting the vision of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

The initiative is not limited to holding meetings. We are working with the U.S. Department of Labor, National Association of



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Secondary School Principals, the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Council of the Great City Schools, the National Football League, and many other vibrant and diverse organizations to provide technical assistance, expertise, and support for state and local leaders.

Our goal is to make a real difference through raising the expectations of our young people and using our resources to expand their opportunities. Ultimately, we must prepare America's youths for a successful future.

The Preparing America's Future High School Initiative team is looking for more concerned Americans of all ages to get involved. This generation of students deserves the very best effort we can make to prepare them for a complex future we can only imagine.

To get involved, and to access updated and detailed information, please visit the U.S. Department of Education's Preparing America's Future Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/highschool>. To contact us, send an e-mail to highschools@ed.gov, or call 202-245-7700.

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education*, 2003.

² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Dropout Rates in the United States*, 1998.

³ Public Agenda, *Reality Check*, 2002.



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*Building
High Schools
Around the
21st-Century Teen*

Today's youths face enormous challenges: a world where most jobs require higher levels of reading, communication, math, and problem-solving skills than ever before and a world where high-skill jobs require higher levels of education and training beyond high school than in the past.

Educators across America are working to create high schools that will prepare today's students for the complexities of 21st-century life, for further education, and for careers. The U.S. Department of Education's Preparing America's Future High School Initiative (PAF-HSI) signifies our dedication to helping educators meet these challenges for all students.

The Challenge

As our young people prepare to become workers and citizens, schools must prepare them for the new expectations of our economy and society. Many students in the United States still attend high schools that were designed to fit the industrial model of the mid-20th century. Although in the 20th century, a large percentage of youths were able to succeed with just basic skills and a good work ethic, that era is a distant memory. Today, **all students** need to acquire both academic knowledge and technical skills, and yet, too many are not receiving this type of high-quality education and development.

- “Every year about a million young people who started high school with their peers

don’t graduate from high school at the same time as their peers.” (*High School Graduation Rates in the United States*, Jay P. Green, The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, September 2003)

- Approximately 11 percent of young adults ages 16-24 are out of school and lack any high school credential (including the GED).¹
- Students from poor families are considerably more likely to leave high school than students from families with high incomes.²
- Seventy-three percent of employers rate the writing skills of recent high school graduates as fair or poor, while 63 percent express dissatisfaction with graduates’ math skills.³
- In 2000, the math skills of 83 percent of 12th-grade students were below the proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). When one disaggregates the data by race and ethnicity, the crisis appears even more urgent: the math skills of 97 percent of African-American students and 96 percent of Hispanics were below proficient. While the average math scores of white, African-American, and Hispanic fourth- and eighth-graders increased between 1990 and 2000, among 12th-graders, only white students scored significantly higher in 2000 than they did in 1990 (NAEP, 2000).



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“Every high school diploma must mean that our graduates are prepared for jobs, for college, and for success.”

– President George W. Bush

- In 2000, 82 percent of 12th-grade students performed below the proficient level on the NAEP science assessment (NAEP, 2000).

“The new jobs require, in the great majority, qualifications the blue-collar worker does not possess and is poorly equipped to acquire. The new jobs require a good deal of formal education and the ability to acquire and to apply theoretical and analytical knowledge. They require a different approach to work and a different mindset. Above all, they require a habit of continual learning.”

– Peter Drucker,
Management Expert and Author

Today’s youths—living and working in the 21st century—need solid academic preparation—not just for the Ivy League and other universities—but for the trades, automotive repair, high-tech manufacturing, and other jobs that provide self-supporting income. They also need skills to manage their personal lives, guide their families, and actively exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

They also need these foundational skills to manage their personal lives, guide their families, and actively exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The Promise

The United States cannot continue to succeed in a challenging international economic environment if we allow large numbers of our youths to leave high school unprepared.

Fortunately, America’s education leaders are responding to the call for change.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) is the landmark bipartisan education legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bush. Under NCLB, states must describe how they will ensure that all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency and that the achievement gaps among groups of students are eliminated. NCLB has made changes in the American education system that are already yielding results.

Older students are among those benefiting from the high expectations found in NCLB. Many high schools are finding ways to help students catch up academically, master high levels of academic content, and make smooth transitions into further education and training and the high-skill workplace.

The New Vision

Leaders in education, civic and community organizations, business, and government are working with youths and their families to create a new kind of high school for the new century.

The primary distinctions needed to bring success to a high school do not lie in changes in architecture or class scheduling. Rather, changes are needed in expectations and outcomes.

Many high schools have embraced a new vision—a vision that calls for having every youth complete high school ready for the next

step in a successful life. A school that provides rigorous academics will maximize the number of choices a student has after graduation. A rigorous academic foundation will help prepare students for postsecondary education, training, or a career.

Here are some examples of schools that embrace a new vision for their students:

Washtenaw Technical Middle College (WTMC) in Ann Arbor, Mich., is a public charter high school serving approximately 300 students. Students take academic and career development courses and, in partnership between the high school and Washtenaw Community College, where it is housed, more than half of the WTMC graduates earn associate degrees at the same time as their high school diploma.

Students attending 26 area high schools and taking classes through the **Western Arkansas Technical Center** based at the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith campus, may earn a high school diploma in addition to 20 or more credit hours toward an associate degree in computer information systems, surgical technology, machine tool technology, or welding.

The **Miami Valley Tech Prep Consortium** in the Dayton, Ohio, area offers an engineering technology program that begins in high school with a mix of college prep academics and technical coursework and that culminates with one of the 15 associate degree engineering programs at Sinclair Community College.

Littleton High School in Littleton, Colo., is a large high school in an affluent suburb. Littleton High School has conducted studies on improving education for its students, has instituted a block schedule to support standards-based learning, and created a school within a school to reach freshmen in need of intervention. These alterations to Littleton High

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“Students must see high school as being important to their future if they are to make the effort required to succeed in challenging academic and career studies. Students tend to see this when: there are high expectations and rigorous assignments; they can connect what they are asked to learn to their lives and to their goals; and they believe the adults in the school believe in them enough to offer them the assistance they need to succeed. For many students, this will require that we blend together challenging academic studies with high-quality/high-demand career studies that can lead to good jobs and postsecondary studies.”

– Gene Bottoms, Senior Vice President,
Southern Regional Education Board